This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

21453.5

HARVARD
COLLEGE
LIBRARY

[redacted]

Édition de Luxe

OUR MUTUAL FRIEND

BY

CHARLES DICKENS

VOL. I.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY MARCUS STONE

BOSTON
ESTES & LAURIAT
1890

(47)

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

VOL. I.

	PAGE
The Bird of Prey	*Frontispiece*
Portrait of Dickens (*æt.* 56). From a Photograph taken in America by Mason & Co., 1868	*Title Page*
Witnessing the Agreement	59
At the Bar	97
Mr. Venus surrounded by the Trophies of his Art	121
The Boffin Progress	154
The Happy Pair	185
Podsnappery	208
Waiting for Father	247
The Bird of Prey brought down	263
Mrs. Boffin discovers an Orphan	296
The Person of the House and the Bad Child	363
Bringing him in	378
The Garden on the Roof	422

OUR MUTUAL FRIEND.

IN FOUR BOOKS.

BOOK THE FIRST. THE CUP AND THE LIP.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE LOOKOUT.

In these times of ours, though concerning the exact year there is no need to be precise, a boat of dirty and disreputable appearance, with two figures in it, floated on the Thames, between Southwark Bridge, which is of iron, and London Bridge, which is of stone, as an autumn evening was closing in.

The figures in this boat were those of a strong man with ragged, grizzled hair and a sun-browned face, and a dark girl of nineteen or twenty, sufficiently like him to be recognizable as his daughter. The girl rowed, pulling a pair of sculls very easily; the man, with the rudder-lines slack in his hands, and his hands loose in his waistband, kept an eager lookout. He had no net, hook, or line, and he could not be a fisherman; his boat had no cushion for a sitter, no paint, no inscription, no appliance

beyond a rusty boat-hook and a coil of rope, and he could not be a waterman; his boat was too crazy and too small to take in cargo for delivery, and he could not be a lighterman or river carrier: there was no clew to what he looked for, but he looked for something with a most intent and searching gaze. The tide, which had turned an hour before, was running down, and his eyes watched every little race and eddy in its broad sweep, as the boat made slight headway against, or drove stern foremost before it, according as he directed his daughter by a movement of his head. She watched his face as earnestly as he watched the river. But in the intensity of her look there was a touch of dread or horror.

Allied to the bottom of the river rather than the surface, by reason of the slime and ooze with which it was covered, and its sodden state, this boat and the two figures in it obviously were doing something that they often did, and were seeking what they often sought. Half savage as the man showed, with no covering on his matted head, with his brown arms bare to between the elbow and the shoulder, with the loose knot of a looser kerchief lying low on his bare breast in a wilderness of beard and whisker, with such dress as he wore seeming to be made out of the mud that begrimed his boat, still there was business-like usage in his steady gaze. So with every lithe action of the girl, with every turn of her wrist, perhaps most of all with her look of dread or horror; they were things of usage.

"Keep her out, Lizzie. Tide runs strong here. Keep her well afore the sweep of it."

Trusting to the girl's skill, and making no use of the rudder, he eyed the coming tide with an absorbed attention. So the girl eyed him. But it happened now that a slant of light from the setting sun glanced into the bottom of the boat, and, touching a rotten stain there which bore some resemblance to the outline of a muffled human form, colored it as though with diluted blood. This caught the girl's eye, and she shivered.

"What ails you?" said the man, immediately aware of it, though so intent on the advancing waters; "I see nothing afloat."

The red light was gone, the shudder was gone, and his gaze, which had come back to the boat for a moment, travelled away again. Wheresoever the strong tide met with an impediment, his gaze paused for an instant. At every mooring chain and rope, at every stationary boat or barge that split the current into a broad arrow-head, at the offsets from the piers of Southwark Bridge, at the paddles of the river steamboats as they beat the filthy water, at the floating logs of timber lashed together lying off certain wharves, his shining eyes darted a hungry look. After a darkening hour or so, suddenly the rudder-lines tightened in his hold, and he steered hard towards the Surrey shore.

Always watching his face, the girl instantly answered to the action in her sculling; presently the boat swung round, quivered as from a sudden jerk, and the upper half of the man was stretched out over the stern.

The girl pulled the hood of a cloak she wore over her head and over her face, and, looking backward

so that the front folds of this hood were turned down the river, kept the boat in that direction going before the tide. Until now the boat had barely held her own, and had hovered about one spot; but now the banks changed swiftly, and the deepening shadows and the kindling lights of London Bridge were passed, and the tiers of shipping lay on either hand.

It was not until now that the upper half of the man came back into the boat. His arms were wet and dirty, and he washed them over the side. In his right hand he held something, and he washed that in the river too. It was money. He chinked it once, and he blew upon it once, and he spat upon it once — "for luck," he hoarsely said — before he put it in his pocket.

"Lizzie!"

The girl turned her face towards him with a start, and rowed in silence. Her face was very pale. He was a hook-nosed man, and, with that and his bright eyes and his ruffled head, bore a certain likeness to a roused bird of prey.

"Take that thing off your face."

She put it back.

"Here! and give me hold of the sculls. I'll take the rest of the spell."

"No, no, father! No! I can't indeed. Father! I cannot sit so near it!"

He was moving towards her to change places, but her terrified expostulation stopped him, and he resumed his seat.

"What hurt can it do you?"

"None, none. But I cannot bear it."

"It's my belief you hate the sight of the very river."

"I — I do not like it, father."

"As if it wasn't your living! As if it wasn't meat and drink to you!"

At these latter words the girl shivered again, and for a moment paused in her rowing, seeming to turn deadly faint. It escaped his attention, for he was glancing over the stern at something the boat had in tow.

"How can you be so thankless to your best friend, Lizzie? The very fire that warmed you when you were a babby was picked out of the river alongside the coal barges. The very basket that you slept in, the tide washed ashore. The very rockers that I put it upon to make a cradle of it, I cut out of a piece of wood that drifted from some ship or another."

Lizzie took her right hand from the scull it held, and touched her lips with it, and for a moment held it out lovingly towards him; then, without speaking, she resumed her rowing, as another boat of similar appearance, though in rather better trim, came out from a dark place, and dropped softly alongside.

"In luck again, Gaffer?" said a man with a squinting leer, who sculled her, and who was alone. "I knowed you was in luck again by your wake as you come down."

"Ah!" replied the other dryly. "So you're out, are you?"

"Yes, pardner."

There was now a tender yellow moonlight on the river, and the new-comer, keeping half his boat's length astern of the other boat, looked hard at its track.

"I says to myself," he went on, "directly you hove in view, Yonder's Gaffer, and in luck again, by George, if he ain't! Scull it is, pardner — don't fret yourself — I didn't touch him." This was in answer to a quick, impatient movement on the part of Gaffer: the speaker at the same time unshipping his scull on that side, and laying his hand on the gunwale of Gaffer's boat, and holding to it.

"He's had touches enough not to want no more, as well as I make him out, Gaffer! Been a-knocking about with a pretty many tides, ain't he, pardner? Such is my out-of-luck ways, you see! He must have passed me when he went up last time, for I was on the lookout below bridge here. I a'most think you're like the wulturs, pardner, and scent 'em out."

He spoke in a dropped voice, with more than one glance at Lizzie, who had pulled on her hood again. Both men then looked with a weird, unholy interest at the wake of Gaffer's boat.

"Easy does it betwixt us. Shall I take him aboard, pardner?"

"No," said the other. In so surly a tone that the man, after a blank stare, acknowledged it with the retort, —

"Arn't been eating nothing as has disagreed with you, have you, pardner?"

"Why, yes, I have," said Gaffer. "I have been swallowing too much of that word, Pardner. I am no pardner of yours."

"Since when was you no pardner of mine, Gaffer Hexam, Esquire?"

"Since you was accused of robbing a man. Accused of robbing a live man!" said Gaffer with great indignation.

"And what if I had been accused of robbing a dead man, Gaffer?"

"You COULDN'T do it."

"Couldn't you, Gaffer?"

"No. Has a dead man any use for money? Is it possible for a dead man to have money? What world does a dead man belong to? T'other world. What world does money belong to? This world. How can money be a corpse's? Can a corpse own it, want it, spend it, claim it, miss it? Don't try to go confounding the rights and wrongs of things in that way. But it's worthy of the sneaking spirit that robs a live man."

"I will tell you what it is" —

"No, you won't. *I'll* tell you what it is. You've got off with a short time of it for putting your hand in the pocket of a sailor, a live sailor. Make the most of it, and think yourself lucky, but don't think, after that, to come over *me* with your pardners. We have worked together in time past, but we work together no more in time present, nor yet future. Let go. Cast off!"

"Gaffer! If you think to get rid of me this way" —

"If I don't get rid of you this way, I'll try another, and chop you over the fingers with the stretcher, or take a pick at your head with the boat-hook. Cast off! Pull you, Lizzie. Pull home, since you won't let your father pull."

Lizzie shot ahead, and the other boat fell astern. Lizzie's father, composing himself into the easy attitude of one who had asserted the high moralities and taken an unassailable position, slowly lighted a pipe, and smoked, and took a survey of

what he had in tow. What he had in tow lunged itself at him sometimes in an awful manner when the boat was checked, and sometimes seemed to try to wrench itself away, though for the most part it followed submissively. A neophyte might have fancied that the ripples passing over it were dreadfully like faint changes of expression on a sightless face; but Gaffer was no neophyte, and had no fancies.

CHAPTER II.

THE MAN FROM SOMEWHERE.

Mr. and Mrs. Veneering were brand-new people in a brand-new house in a brand-new quarter of London. Everything about the Veneerings was spick-and-span new. All their furniture was new, all their friends were new, all their servants were new, their plate was new, their carriage was new, their harness was new, their horses were new, their pictures were new, they themselves were new, they were as newly married as was lawfully compatible with their having a brand-new baby, and, if they had set up a great-grandfather he would have come home in matting from the Pantechnicon, without a scratch upon him, French polished to the crown of his head.

For, in the Veneering establishment, from the hall chairs with the new coat-of-arms to the grand pianoforte with the new action, and upstairs again to the new fire-escape, all things were in a state of high varnish and polish. And what was observable in the furniture was observable in the Veneerings —the surface smelled a little too much of the workshop, and was a trifle sticky.

There was an innocent piece of dinner furniture

that went upon easy casters, and was kept over a livery-stable yard in Duke Street, St. James's, when not in use, to whom the Veneerings were a source of blind confusion. The name of this article was Twemlow. Being first cousin to Lord Snigsworth, he was in frequent requisition, and at many houses might be said to represent the dining-table in its normal state. Mr. and Mrs. Veneering, for example, arranging a dinner, habitually started with Twemlow, and then put leaves in him, or added guests to him. Sometimes, the table consisted of Twemlow and half a dozen leaves; sometimes, of Twemlow and a dozen leaves; sometimes, Twemlow was pulled out to its utmost extent of twenty leaves. Mr. and Mrs. Veneering on occasions of ceremony faced each other in the centre of the board, and thus the parallel still held; for, it always happened that the more Twemlow was pulled out, the farther he found himself from the centre, and the nearer to the sideboard at one end of the room, or the window curtains at the other.

But it was not this which steeped the feeble soul of Twemlow in confusion. This he was used to, and could take soundings of. The abyss to which he could find no bottom, and from which started forth the engrossing and ever-swelling difficulty of his life, was the insoluble question whether he was Veneering's oldest friend or newest friend. To the excogitation of this problem the harmless gentleman had devoted many anxious hours, both in his lodgings over the livery-stable yard, and in the cold gloom, favorable to meditation, of St. James's Square. Thus. Twemlow had first known Veneering at his club, where Veneering then knew nobody

but the man who made them known to one another, who seemed to be the most intimate friend he had in the world, and whom he had known two days — the bond of union between their souls, the nefarious conduct of the committee respecting the cookery of a fillet of veal, having been accidentally cemented at that date. Immediately upon this, Twemlow received an invitation to dine with Veneering, and dined: the man being of the party. Immediately upon that, Twemlow received an invitation to dine with the man, and dined: Veneering being of the party. At the man's were a Member, an Engineer, a Payer-off of the National Debt, a Poem on Shakspeare, a Grievance, and a Public Office, who all seemed to be utter strangers to Veneering. And yet, immediately after that, Twemlow received an invitation to dine at Veneering's expressly to meet the Member, the Engineer, the Payer-off of the National Debt, the Poem on Shakspeare, the Grievance, and the Public Office, and, dining, discovered that all of them were the most intimate friends Veneering had in the world, and that the wives of all of them (who were all there) were the objects of Mrs. Veneering's most devoted affection and tender confidence.

Thus it had come about that Mr. Twemlow had said to himself in his lodgings, with his hand to his forehead: "I must not think of this. This is enough to soften any man's brain,"—and yet was always thinking of it, and could never form a conclusion.

This evening the Veneerings give a banquet. Eleven leaves in the Twemlow; fourteen in company all told. Four pigeon-breasted retainers in

plain clothes stand in line in the hall. A fifth retainer, proceeding up the staircase with a mournful air — as who should say, "Here is another wretched creature come to dinner; such is life!" — announces "Mister Twemlow!"

Mrs. Veneering welcomes her sweet Mr. Twemlow. Mr. Veneering welcomes his dear Twemlow. Mrs. Veneering does not expect that Mr. Twemlow can in nature care much for such insipid things as babies, but so old a friend must please to look at baby. "Ah! You will know the friend of your family better, Tootleums," says Mr. Veneering, nodding emotionally at that new article, "when you begin to take notice." He then begs to make his dear Twemlow known to his two friends, Mr. Boots and Mr. Brewer — and clearly has no distinct idea which is which.

But now a fearful circumstance occurs.

"Mis-ter and Mis-sis Podsnap!"

"My dear," says Mr. Veneering to Mrs. Veneering, with an air of much friendly interest, while the door stands open, "the Podsnaps."

A too, too smiling large man, with a fatal freshness on him, appearing with his wife, instantly deserts his wife and darts at Twemlow with, —

"How do you do? So glad to know you. Charming house you have here. I hope we are not late. So glad of this opportunity, I am sure!"

When the first shock fell upon him, Twemlow twice skipped back in his neat little shoes and his neat little silk stockings of a bygone fashion, as if impelled to leap over a sofa behind him; but the large man closed with him, and proved too strong.

"Let me," says the large man, trying to attract

the attention of his wife in the distance, "have the pleasure of presenting Mrs. Podsnap to her host. She will be" — in his fatal freshness he seems to find perpetual verdure and eternal youth in the phrase — "she will be so glad of the opportunity, I am sure!"

In the meantime, Mrs. Podsnap, unable to originate a mistake on her own account, because Mrs. Veneering is the only other lady there, does her best in the way of handsomely supporting her husband's, by looking towards Mr. Twemlow with a plaintive countenance, and remarking to Mrs. Veneering in a feeling manner, firstly, that she fears he has been rather bilious of late, and, secondly, that the baby is already very like him.

It is questionable whether any man quite relishes being mistaken for any other man; but Mr. Veneering, having this very evening set up the shirt-front of the young Antinous (in new worked cambric just come home), is not at all complimented by being supposed to be Twemlow, who is dry and weazen, and some thirty years older. Mrs. Veneering equally resents the imputation of being the wife of Twemlow. As to Twemlow, he is so sensible of being a much better bred man than Veneering, that he considers the large man an offensive ass.

In this complicated dilemma, Mr. Veneering approaches the large man with extended hand, and smilingly assures that incorrigible personage that he is delighted to see him: who in his fatal freshness instantly replies, —

"Thank you. I am ashamed to say that I cannot at this moment recall where we met, but I am so glad of this opportunity, I am sure!"

Then, pouncing upon Twemlow, who holds back with all his feeble might, he is haling him off, to present him, as Veneering, to Mrs. Podsnap, when the arrival of more guests unravels the mistake. Whereupon, having re-shaken hands with Veneering as Veneering, he re-shakes hands with Twemlow as Twemlow, and winds it all up to his own perfect satisfaction by saying to the last named, "Ridiculous opportunity — but so glad of it, I am sure!"

Now, Twemlow having undergone this terrific experience, having likewise noted the fusion of Boots in Brewer, and Brewer in Boots, and having further observed that, of the remaining seven guests, four discreet characters enter with wandering eyes, and wholly decline to commit themselves as to which is Veneering, until Veneering has them in his grasp; — Twemlow, having profited by these studies, finds his brain wholesomely hardening as he approaches the conclusion that he really is Veneering's oldest friend, when his brain softens again, and all is lost, through his eyes encountering Veneering and the large man linked together as twin brothers in the back drawing-room near the conservatory door, and through his ears informing him, in the tones of Mrs. Veneering, that the same large man is to be baby's godfather.

"Dinner is on the table!"

Thus the melancholy retainer, as who should say, "Come down and be poisoned, ye unhappy children of men!"

Twemlow, having no lady assigned to him, goes down in the rear, with his hand to his forehead. Boots and Brewer, thinking him indisposed, whisper, "Man faint. Had no lunch." But he is only

stunned by the unvanquishable difficulty of his existence.

Revived by soup, Twemlow discourses mildly of the Court Circular with Boots and Brewer. Is appealed to, at the fish stage of the banquet, by Veneering, on the disputed question whether his cousin, Lord Snigsworth, is in or out of town? Gives it that his cousin is out of town. "At Snigsworthy Park?" Veneering inquires. "At Snigsworthy," Twemlow rejoins. Boots and Brewer regard this as a man to be cultivated; and Veneering is clear that he is a remunerative article. Meantime, the retainer goes round, like a gloomy Analytical Chemist: always seeming to say, after "Chablis, sir?" — "You wouldn't if you knew what it's made of."

The great looking-glass above the sideboard reflects the table and the company. Reflects the new Veneering crest, in gold and eke in silver, frosted and also thawed, a camel-of-all-work. The Heralds' College found out a crusading ancestor for Veneering, who bore a camel on his shield (or might have done it if he had thought of it), and a caravan of camels take charge of the fruits and flowers and candles, and kneel down to be loaded with the salt. Reflects Veneering; forty, wavy-haired, dark, tending to corpulence, sly, mysterious, filmy — a kind of sufficiently well-looking veiled-prophet, not prophesying. Reflects Mrs. Veneering; fair, aquiline-nosed and fingered, not so much light hair as she might have, gorgeous in raiment and jewels, enthusiastic, propitiatory, conscious that a corner of her husband's veil is over herself. Reflects Podsnap; prosperously feeding, two little light-colored wiry

wings, one on either side of his else bald head, looking as like his hair-brushes as his hair, dissolving view of red beads on his forehead, large allowance of crumpled shirt collar up behind. Reflects Mrs. Podsnap; fine woman for Professor Owen, quantity of bone, neck and nostrils like a rocking-horse, hard features, majestic head-dress, in which Podsnap has hung golden offerings. Reflects Twemlow; gray, dry, polite, susceptible to east wind, First-Gentleman-in-Europe collar and cravat, cheeks drawn in as if he had made a great effort to retire into himself some years ago, and had got so far, and had never got any farther. Reflects mature young lady; raven locks, and complexion that lights up well when well powdered — as it is — carrying on considerably in the captivation of mature young gentleman: with too much nose in his face, too much ginger in his whiskers, too much torso in his waistcoat, too much sparkle in his studs, his eyes, his buttons, his talk, and his teeth. Reflects charming old Lady Tippins, on Veneering's right; with an immense obtuse drab oblong face, like a face in a tablespoon, and a dyed Long Walk up the top of her head, as a convenient public approach to the bunch of false hair behind, pleased to patronize Mrs. Veneering opposite, who is pleased to be patronized. Reflects a certain "Mortimer," another of Veneering's old friends; who never was in the house before, and appears not to want to come again, who sits disconsolate on Mrs. Veneering's left, and who was inveigled by Lady Tippins (a friend of his boyhood) to come to these people's and talk, and who won't talk. Reflects Eugene, friend of Mortimer; buried alive in the back of his chair, behind a shoulder

— with a powder-epaulet on it — of the mature young lady, and gloomily resorting to the champagne chalice whenever proffered by the Analytical Chemist. Lastly, the looking-glass reflects Boots and Brewer, and two other stuffed Buffers interposed between the rest of the company and possible accidents.

The Veneering dinners are excellent dinners — or new people wouldn't come — and all goes well. Notably, Lady Tippins has made a series of experiments on her digestive functions, so extremely complicated and daring, that if they could be published, with their results, it might benefit the human race. Having taken in provisions from all parts of the world, this hardy old cruiser has last touched at the North Pole, when, as the ice-plates are being removed, the following words fall from her: —

"I assure you, my dear Veneering" —

(Poor Twemlow's hand approaches his forehead, for it would seem, now, that Lady Tippins is going to be the oldest friend.)

"I assure you, my dear Veneering, that it is the oddest affair! Like the advertising people, I don't ask you to trust me without offering a respectable reference. Mortimer there is my reference, and knows all about it."

Mortimer raises his drooping eyelids, and slightly opens his mouth. But a faint smile, expressive of "What's the use?" passes over his face, and he drops his eyelids and shuts his mouth.

"Now, Mortimer," says Lady Tippins, rapping the sticks of her closed green fan upon the knuckles of her left hand — which is particularly rich in

knuckles — "I insist upon your telling all that is to be told about the man from Jamaica."

"Give you my honor I never heard of any man from Jamaica, except the man who was a brother," replies Mortimer.

"Tobago, then."

"Nor yet from Tobago."

"Except," Eugene strikes in: so unexpectedly that the mature young lady, who has forgotten all about him, with a start takes the epaulet out of his way: "except our friend who long lived on rice-pudding and isinglass, till at length, to his something or other, his physician said something else, and a leg of mutton somehow ended in daygo."

A reviving impression goes round the table that Eugene is coming out. An unfulfilled impression, for he goes in again.

"Now, my dear Mrs. Veneering," quoth Lady Tippins, "I appeal to you whether this is not the basest conduct ever known in this world? I carry my lovers about, two or three at a time, on condition that they are very obedient and devoted; and here is my old lover-in-chief, the head of all my slaves, throwing off his allegiance before company! And here is another of my lovers, a rough Cymon at present, certainly, but of whom I had most hopeful expectations as to his turning out well in course of time, pretending that he can't remember his nursery rhymes! On purpose to annoy me, for he knows how I dote upon them!"

A grisly little fiction concerning her lovers is Lady Tippins's point. She is always attended by a lover or two, and she keeps a little list of her lovers, and she is always booking a new lover, or

striking out an old lover, or putting a lover in her black list, or promoting a lover to her blue list, or adding up her lovers, or otherwise posting her book. Mrs. Veneering is charmed by her humor, and so is Veneering. Perhaps it is enhanced by a certain yellow play in Lady Tippins's throat, like the legs of scratching poultry.

"I banish the false wretch from this moment, and I strike him out of my Cupidon (my name for my Ledger, my dear) this very night. But I am resolved to have the account of the man from Somewhere, and I beg you to elicit it for me, my love," to Mrs. Veneering, "as I have lost my own influence. Oh, you perjured man!" This to Mortimer, with a rattle of her fan.

"We are all very much interested in the man from Somewhere," Veneering observes.

Then the four Buffers, taking heart of grace all four at once, say, —

"Deeply interested!"

"Quite excited!"

"Dramatic!"

"Man from Nowhere, perhaps!"

And then Mrs. Veneering — for Lady Tippins's winning wiles are contagious — folds her hands in the manner of a supplicating child, turns to her left neighbor, and says, "Tease! Pay! Man from Tumwhere!" At which the four Buffers, again mysteriously moved all four at once, exclaim, "You can't resist!"

"Upon my life," says Mortimer languidly, "I find it immensely embarrassing to have the eyes of Europe upon me to this extent, and my only consolation is that you will all of you execrate Lady

Tippins in your secret hearts when you find, as you inevitably will, the man from Somewhere a bore. Sorry to destroy romance by fixing him with a local habitation, but he comes from the place, the name of which escapes me, but will suggest itself to everybody else here, where they make the wine."

Eugene suggests "Day and Martin's."

"No, not that place," returns the unmoved Mortimer; "that's where they make the Port. My man comes from the country where they make the Cape Wine. But look here, old fellow; it's not at all statistical, and it's rather odd."

It is always noticeable, at the table of the Veneerings, that no man troubles himself much about the Veneerings themselves, and that any one who has anything to tell, generally tells it to anybody else in preference.

"The man," Mortimer goes on, addressing Eugene, "whose name is Harmon, was only son of a tremendous old rascal who made his money by Dust."

"Red velveteens and a bell?" the gloomy Eugene inquires.

"And a ladder and basket if you like. By which means, or by others, he grew rich as a Dust Contractor, and lived in a hollow in a hilly country entirely composed of Dust. On his own small estate the growling old vagabond threw up his own mountain range, like an old volcano, and its geological formation was Dust. Coal-dust, vegetable-dust, bone-dust, crockery-dust, rough dust and sifted dust, — all manner of Dust."

A passing remembrance of Mrs. Veneering here induces Mortimer to address his next half-dozen words to her; after which he wanders away again,

tries Twemlow and finds he doesn't answer, ultimately takes up with the Buffers, who receive him enthusiastically.

"The moral being — I believe that's the right expression — of this exemplary person derived its highest gratification from anathematizing his nearest relations, and turning them out of doors. Having begun (as was natural) by rendering these attentions to the wife of his bosom, he next found himself at leisure to bestow a similar recognition on the claims of his daughter. He chose a husband for her entirely to his own satisfaction, and not in the least to hers, and proceeded to settle upon her, as her marriage portion, I don't know how much Dust, but something immense. At this stage of the affair the poor girl respectfully intimated that she was secretly engaged to that popular character whom the novelists and versifiers call Another, and that such a marriage would make Dust of her heart and Dust of her life — in short, would set her up, on a very extensive scale, in her father's business. Immediately the venerable parent — on a cold winter's night, it is said — anathematized and turned her out."

Here, the Analytical Chemist (who has evidently formed a very low opinion of Mortimer's story) concedes a little claret to the Buffers; who, again mysteriously moved all four at once, screw it slowly into themselves with a peculiar twist of enjoyment, as they cry in chorus, "Pray go on."

"The pecuniary resources of Another were, as they usually are, of a very limited nature. I believe I am not using too strong an expression when I say that Another was hard up. However, he married

the young lady, and they lived in a humble dwelling, probably possessing a porch ornamented with honeysuckle and woodbine twining, until she died. I must refer you to the Registrar of the District in which the humble dwelling was situated, for the certified cause of death; but early sorrow and anxiety may have had to do with it, though they may not appear in the ruled pages and printed forms. Indisputably this was the case with Another, for he was so cut up by the loss of his young wife, that, if he outlived her a year, it was as much as he did."

There is that in the indolent Mortimer which seems to hint that, if good society might on any account allow itself to be impressible, he, one of good society, might have the weakness to be impressed by what he here relates. It is hidden with great pains, but it is in him. The gloomy Eugene, too, is not without some kindred touch; for, when that appalling Lady Tippins declares that, if Another had survived, he should have gone down at the head of her list of lovers — and also when the mature young lady shrugs her epaulets and laughs at some private and confidential comment from the mature young gentleman — his gloom deepens to that degree that he trifles quite ferociously with his dessert knife.

Mortimer proceeds.

"We must now return, as the novelists say, and as we all wish they wouldn't, to the man from Somewhere. Being a boy of fourteen, cheaply educating at Brussels when his sister's expulsion befell, it was some little time before he heard of it — probably from herself, for the mother was dead; but that I don't know. Instantly, he absconded, and

came over here. He must have been a boy of spirit and resource to get here on a stopped allowance of five sous a week; but he did it somehow, and he burst in on his father, and pleaded his sister's cause. Venerable parent promptly resorts to anathematization, and turns him out. Shocked and terrified boy takes flight, seeks his fortune, gets aboard ship, ultimately turns up on dry land among the Cape wine: small proprietor, farmer, grower — whatever you like to call it."

At this juncture shuffling is heard in the hall, and tapping is heard at the dining-room door. Analytical Chemist goes to the door, confers angrily with unseen tapper, appears to become mollified by descrying reason in the tapping, and goes out.

"So he was discovered, only the other day, after having been expatriated about fourteen years."

A Buffer, suddenly astounding the other three by detaching himself, and asserting individuality, inquires: "How discovered, and why?"

"Ah! To be sure. Thank you for reminding me. Venerable parent dies."

Same Buffer, emboldened by success, says: "When?"

"The other day. Ten or twelve months ago."

Same Buffer inquires with smartness, "What of?" But herein perishes a melancholy example; being regarded by the other three Buffers with a stony stare, and attracting no further attention from any mortal.

"Venerable parent," Mortimer repeats, with a passing remembrance that there is a Veneering at table, and for the first time addressing him — "dies."

The gratified Veneering repeats gravely, "Dies;" and folds his arms, and composes his brow to hear it out in a judicial manner, when he finds himself again deserted in the bleak world.

"His will is found," says Mortimer, catching Mrs. Podsnap's rocking-horse's eye. "It is dated very soon after the son's flight. It leaves the lowest of the range of dust mountains, with some sort of a dwelling-house at its foot, to an old servant who is sole executor, and all the rest of the property — which is very considerable — to the son. He directs himself to be buried with certain eccentric ceremonies and precautions against his coming to life, with which I need not bore you, and that's all — except" — and this ends the story.

The Analytical Chemist returning, everybody looks at him. Not because anybody wants to see him, but because of that subtle influence in nature which impels humanity to embrace the slightest opportunity of looking at anything, rather than the person who addresses it.

"— Except that the son's inheriting is made conditional on his marrying a girl who, at the date of the will, was a child of four or five years old, and who is now a marriageable young woman. Advertisement and inquiry discovered the son in the man from Somewhere, and, at the present moment, he is on his way home from there — no doubt, in a state of great astonishment — to succeed to a very large fortune, and to take a wife."

Mrs. Podsnap inquires whether the young person is a young person of personal charms? Mortimer is unable to report.

Mr. Podsnap inquires what would become of the

very large fortune, in the event of the marriage condition not being fulfilled? Mortimer replies, that by special testamentary clause it would then go to the old servant above mentioned, passing over and excluding the son; also, that if the son had not been living, the same old servant would have been sole residuary legatee.

Mrs. Veneering has just succeeded in waking Lady Tippins from a snore by dexterously shunting a train of plates and dishes at her knuckles across the table; when everybody but Mortimer himself becomes aware that the Analytical Chemist is, in a ghostly manner, offering him a folded paper. Curiosity detains Mrs. Veneering a few moments.

Mortimer, in spite of all the arts of the chemist, placidly refreshes himself with a glass of madeira, and remains unconscious of the document which engrosses the general attention, until Lady Tippins (who has a habit of waking totally insensible), having remembered where she is, and recovered a perception of surrounding objects, says: "Falser man than Don Juan; why don't you take the note from the Commendatore?" Upon which the chemist advances it under the nose of Mortimer, who looks round at him, and says, —

"What's this?"

Analytical Chemist bends and whispers.

"*Who?*" says Mortimer.

Analytical Chemist again bends and whispers.

Mortimer stares at him, and unfolds the paper. Reads it, reads it twice, turns it over to look at the blank outside, reads it a third time.

"This arrives in an extraordinarily opportune manner," says Mortimer then, looking with an

altered face round the table; "this is the conclusion of the story of the identical man."

"Already married?" one guesses.

"Declines to marry?" another guesses.

"Codicil among the dust?" another guesses.

"Why, no," says Mortimer; "remarkable thing, you are all wrong. The story is completer and rather more exciting than I supposed. Man's drowned!"

CHAPTER III.

ANOTHER MAN.

As the disappearing skirts of the ladies ascended the Veneering staircase, Mortimer, following them forth from the dining-room, turned into a library of brand-new books, in brand-new bindings liberally gilded, and requested to see the messenger who had brought the paper. He was a boy of about fifteen. Mortimer looked at the boy, and the boy looked at the brand-new pilgrims on the wall, going to Canterbury in more gold frame than procession, and more carving than country.

"Whose writing is this?"

"Mine, sir."

"Who told you to write it?"

"My father, Jesse Hexam."

"Is it he who found the body?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is your father?"

The boy hesitated, looked reproachfully at the pilgrims as if they had involved him in a little difficulty, then said, folding a plait in the right leg of his trousers, "He gets his living alongshore."

"Is it far?"

"Is which far?" asked the boy, upon his guard, and again upon the road to Canterbury.

"To your father's?"

"It's a goodish stretch, sir. I come up in a cab, and the cab's waiting to be paid. We could go back in it before you paid it, if you liked. I went first to your office, according to the direction of the papers found in the pockets, and there I see nobody but a chap of about my age, who sent me on here."

There was a curious mixture in the boy of uncompleted savagery and uncompleted civilization. His voice was hoarse and coarse, and his face was coarse, and his stunted figure was coarse; but he was cleaner than other boys of his type; and his writing, though large and round, was good; and he glanced at the backs of the books with an awakened curiosity that went below the binding. No one who can read ever looks at a book, even unopened on a shelf, like one who cannot.

"Were any means taken, do you know, boy, to ascertain if it was possible to restore life?" Mortimer inquired as he sought for his hat.

"You wouldn't ask, sir, if you knew his state. Pharaoh's multitude that were drowned in the Red Sea ain't more beyond restoring to life. If Lazarus was only half as far gone, that was the greatest of all the miracles."

"Halloa!" cried Mortimer, turning round with his hat upon his head, "you seem to be at home in the Red Sea, my young friend."

"Read of it with teacher at the school," said the boy.

"And Lazarus?"

"Yes, and him too. But don't you tell my father! We should have no peace in our place if that got touched upon. It's my sister's contriving."

"You seem to have a good sister."

"She ain't half bad," said the boy; "but if she knows her letters, it's the most she does — and them I learned her."

The gloomy Eugene, with his hands in his pockets, had strolled in and assisted at the latter part of the dialogue. When the boy spoke these words slightingly of his sister, he took him roughly enough by the chin, and turned up his face to look at it.

"Well, I'm sure, sir!" said the boy, resisting; "I hope you'll know me again."

Eugene vouchsafed no answer: but made the proposal to Mortimer, "I'll go with you, if you like!" So, they all three went away together in the vehicle that had brought the boy; the two friends (once boys together at a public school) inside, smoking cigars; the messenger on the box beside the driver.

"Let me see," said Mortimer as they went along; "I have been, Eugene, upon the honorable roll of solicitors of the High Court of Chancery, and attorneys at Common Law, five years; and — except gratuitously taking instructions, on an average once a fortnight, for the will of Lady Tippins, who has nothing to leave — I have had no scrap of business but this romantic business."

"And I," said Eugene, "have been 'called' seven years, and have had no business at all, and never shall have any. And if I had, I shouldn't know how to do it."

"I am far from being clear as to the last particular," returned Mortimer with great composure, "that I have much advantage over you."

"I hate," said Eugene, putting his legs up on the opposite seat, "I hate my profession."

"Shall I incommode you if I put mine up too?" returned Mortimer. "Thank you. I hate mine."

"It was forced upon me," said the gloomy Eugene, "because it was understood that we wanted a barrister in the family. We have got a precious one."

"It was forced upon me," said Mortimer, "because it was understood that we wanted a solicitor in the family. And we have got a precious one."

"There are four of us, with our names painted on a door-post in right of one black hole called a set of chambers," said Eugene; "and each of us has the fourth of a clerk — Cassim Baba, in the robber's cave — and Cassim is the only respectable member of the party."

"I am one by myself, one," said Mortimer, "high up an awful staircase commanding a burial-ground, and I have a whole clerk to myself, and he has nothing to do but look at the burial-ground, and what he will turn out, when arrived at maturity, I cannot conceive. Whether, in that shabby rook's nest, he is always plotting wisdom, or plotting murder; whether he will grow up, after so much solitary brooding, to enlighten his fellow-creatures, or to poison them; is the only speck of interest that presents itself to my professional view. Will you give me a light? Thank you."

"Then idiots talk," said Eugene, leaning back, folding his arms, smoking with his eyes shut, and speaking slightly through his nose, "of Energy. If there is a word in the dictionary under any letter from A to Z that I abominate, it is energy. It is such a conventional superstition, such parrot gabble! What the deuce! Am I to rush out into the street, collar the first man of a wealthy appearance that I

meet, shake him, and say, 'Go to law upon the spot, you dog, and retain me, or I'll be the death of you'? Yet that would be energy."

"Precisely my view of the case, Eugene. But show me a good opportunity, show me something really worth being energetic about, and *I'll* show you energy."

"And so will I," said Eugene.

And it is likely enough that ten thousand other young men, within the limits of the London Post-Office town delivery, made the same hopeful remark in the course of the same evening.

The wheels rolled on, and rolled down by the Monument, and by the Tower, and by the Docks; down by Ratcliffe, and by Rotherhithe; down by where accumulated scum of humanity seemed to be washed from higher grounds, like so much moral sewage, and to be pausing until its own weight forced it over the bank and sunk it in the river. In and out among vessels that seemed to have got ashore, and houses that seemed to have got afloat — among bowsprits staring into windows, and windows staring into ships — the wheels rolled on, until they stopped at a dark corner, river-washed, and otherwise not washed at all, where the boy alighted, and opened the door.

"You must walk the rest, sir; it's not many yards." He spoke in the singular number, to the express exclusion of Eugene.

"This is a confoundedly out-of-the-way place," said Mortimer, slipping over the stones and refuse on the shore, as the boy turned the corner sharp.

"Here's my father's, sir; where the light is."

The low building had the look of having once

been a mill. There was a rotten wart of wood upon its forehead that seemed to indicate where the sails had been, but the whole was very indistinctly seen in the obscurity of the night. The boy lifted the latch of the door, and they passed at once into a low, circular room, where a man stood before a red fire, looking down into it, and a girl sat engaged in needlework. The fire was in a rusty brazier, not fitted to the hearth; and a common lamp, shaped like a hyacinth root, smoked and flared in the neck of a stone bottle on the table. There was a wooden bunk or berth in a corner, and in another corner a wooden stair leading above — so clumsy and steep that it was little better than a ladder. Two or three old sculls and oars stood against the wall, and against another part of the wall was a small dresser, making a spare show of the commonest articles of crockery and cooking-vessels. The roof of the room was not plastered, but was formed of the flooring of the room above. This, being very old, knotted, seamed, and beamed, gave a lowering aspect to the chamber; and roof, and walls, and floor alike abounding in old smears of flour, red-lead (or some such stain which it had probably acquired in warehousing), and damp, alike had a look of decomposition.

"The gentleman, father."

The figure at the red fire turned, raised its ruffled head, and looked like a bird of prey.

"You're Mortimer Lightwood, Esquire; are you, sir?"

"Mortimer Lightwood is my name. What you found," said Mortimer, glancing rather shrinkingly towards the bunk; "is it here?"

"'Tain't not to say here, but it's close by. I do everything reg'lar. I've giv' notice of the circumstarnce to the police, and the police have took possession of it. No time ain't been lost, on any hand. The police have put it into print already, and here's what the print says of it."

Taking up the bottle with the lamp in it, he held it near a paper on the wall, with the police heading, BODY FOUND. The two friends read the handbill as it stuck against the wall, and Gaffer read them as he held the light.

"Only papers on the unfortunate man, I see," said Lightwood, glancing from the description of what was found to the finder.

"Only papers."

Here the girl arose with her work in her hand, and went out at the door.

"No money," pursued Mortimer; "but threepence in one of the skirt pockets."

"Three. Penny. Pieces," said Gaffer Hexam in as many sentences.

"The trousers pockets empty, and turned inside out."

Gaffer Hexam nodded. "But that's common. Whether it's the wash of the tide or no, I can't say. Now, here," moving the light to another similar placard, "*his* pockets was found empty, and turned inside out. And here," moving the light to another, "*her* pocket was found empty, and turned inside out. And so was this one's. And so was that one's. I can't read, nor I don't want to read it, for I know 'em by their places on the wall. This one was a sailor, with two anchors and a flag and G. F. T. on his arm. Look and see if he warn't."

"Quite right."

"This one was the young woman in gray boots, and her linen marked with a cross. Look and see if she warn't."

"Quite right."

"This is him as had a nasty cut over the eye. This is them two young sisters what tied themselves together with a handkercher. This is the drunken old chap, in a pair of list slippers and a nightcap, wot had offered — it afterwards come out — to make a hole in the water for a quartern of rum stood aforehand, and kept to his word for the first and last time in his life. They pretty well papers the room, you see; but I know 'em all. I'm scholar enough!"

He waved the light over the whole, as if to typify the light of his scholarly intelligence, and then put it down on the table, and stood behind it, looking intently at his visitors. He had the special peculiarity of some birds of prey, that when he knitted his brow, his ruffled crest stood highest.

"You did not find all these yourself; did you?" asked Eugene.

To which the bird of prey slowly rejoined, "And what might *your* name be, now?"

"This is my friend," Mortimer Lightwood interposed; "Mr. Eugene Wrayburn."

"Mr. Eugene Wrayburn, is it? And what might Mr. Eugene Wrayburn have asked of me?"

"I asked you, simply, if you found all these yourself?"

"I answer you, simply, most on 'em."

"Do you suppose there has been much violence and robbery beforehand among these cases?"

"I don't suppose at all about it," returned Gaffer. "I ain't one of the supposing sort. If you'd got your living to haul out of the river every day of your life, you mightn't be much given to supposing. Am I to show the way?"

As he opened the door, in pursuance of a nod from Lightwood, an extremely pale and disturbed face appeared in the doorway — the face of a man much agitated.

"A body missing?" asked Gaffer Hexam, stopping short; "or a body found? Which?"

"I am lost!" replied the man in a hurried and an eager manner.

"Lost?"

"I — I — am a stranger, and don't know the way. I — I want to find the place where I can see what is described here. It is possible I may know it." He was panting, and could hardly speak; but he showed a copy of the newly printed bill that was still wet upon the wall. Perhaps its newness, or perhaps the accuracy of his observation of its general look, guided Gaffer to a ready conclusion.

"This gentleman, Mr. Lightwood, is on that business."

"Mr. Lightwood?"

During a pause Mortimer and the stranger confronted each other. Neither knew the other.

"I think, sir," said Mortimer, breaking the awkward silence with his airy self-possession, "that you did me the honor to mention my name?"

"I repeated it after this man."

"You said you were a stranger in London?"

"An utter stranger."

"Are you seeking a Mr. Harmon?"

"No."

"Then I believe I can assure you that you are on a fruitless errand, and will not find what you fear to find. Will you come with us?"

A little winding through some muddy alleys, that might have been deposited by the last ill-savored tide, brought them to the wicket-gate and bright lamp of a police-station; where they found the Night Inspector, with a pen and ink, and ruler, posting up his books in a whitewashed office, as studiously as if it were in a monastery on the top of a mountain, and no howling fury of a drunken woman were banging herself against a cell door in the back-yard at his elbow. With the same air of a recluse much given to study, he desisted from his books to bestow a distrustful nod of recognition upon Gaffer, plainly importing, "Ah! we know all about *you*, and you'll overdo it some day;" and to inform Mr. Mortimer Lightwood and friends that he would attend them immediately. Then, he finished ruling the work he had in his hand (it might have been illuminating a missal, he was so calm), in a very neat and methodical manner, showing not the slightest consciousness of the woman who was banging herself with increased violence, and shrieking most terrifically for some other woman's liver.

"A bull's-eye," said the Night Inspector, taking up his keys. Which a deferential satellite produced. "Now, gentlemen."

With one of his keys he opened a cool grot at the end of the yard, and they all went in. They quickly came out again, no one speaking but Eugene: who remarked to Mortimer, in a whisper, "Not *much* worse than Lady Tippins."

So, back to the whitewashed library of the monastery — with that liver still in shrieking requisition, as it had been loudly while they looked at the silent sight they came to see — and there through the merits of the case as summed up by the Abbot. No clew to how body came into river. Very often was no clew. Too late to know, for certain, whether injuries received before or after death; one excellent surgical opinion said, before; other excellent surgical opinion said, after. Steward of ship in which gentleman came home passenger had been round to view, and could swear to identity. Likewise could swear to clothes. And then, you see, you had the papers, too. How was it he had totally disappeared on leaving ship, till found in river? Well! Probably had been upon some little game. Probably thought it a harmless game, wasn't up to things, and it turned out a fatal game. Inquest to-morrow, and no doubt open verdict.

"It appears to have knocked your friend over — knocked him completely off his legs," Mr. Inspector remarked, when he had finished his summing up. "It has given him a bad turn to be sure!" This was said in a very low voice, and with a searching look (not the first he had cast) at the stranger.

Mr. Lightwood explained that it was no friend of his.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Inspector with an attentive ear; "where did you pick him up?"

Mr. Lightwood explained further.

Mr. Inspector had delivered his summing up, and had added these words, with his elbows leaning on his desk, and the fingers and thumb of his right hand fitting themselves to the fingers and thumb of

his left. Mr. Inspector moved nothing but his eyes as he now added, raising his voice, —

"Turned you faint, sir! Seems you're not accustomed to this kind of work?"

The stranger, who was leaning against the chimney-piece with drooping head, looked round and answered, "No. It's a horrible sight!"

"You expected to identify, I am told, sir?"

"Yes."

"*Have* you identified?"

"No. It's a horrible sight. Oh! a horrible, horrible sight!"

"Who did you think it might have been?" asked Mr. Inspector. "Give us a description, sir. Perhaps we can help you."

"No, no," said the stranger; "it would be quite useless. Good-night."

Mr. Inspector had not moved, and had given no order; but, the satellite slipped his back against the wicket, and laid his left arm along the top of it, and with his right hand turned the bull's-eye he had taken from his chief — in quite a casual manner — towards the stranger.

"You missed a friend, you know; or you missed a foe, you know; or you wouldn't have come here, you know. Well, then; ain't it reasonable to ask, who was it?" Thus, Mr. Inspector.

"You must excuse my telling you. No class of man can understand better than you that families may not choose to publish their disagreements and misfortunes, except on the last necessity. I do not dispute that you discharge your duty in asking me the question; you will not dispute my right to withhold the answer. Good-night."

Again he turned towards the wicket, where the satellite, with his eye upon his chief, remained a dumb statue.

"At least," said Mr. Inspector, "you will not object to leave me your card, sir?"

"I should not object if I had one; but I have not." He reddened and was much confused as he gave the answer.

"At least," said Mr. Inspector, with no change of voice or manner, "you will not object to write down your name and address?"

"Not at all."

Mr. Inspector dipped a pen in his inkstand, and deftly laid it on a piece of paper close beside him; then resumed his former attitude. The stranger stepped up to the desk, and wrote in a rather tremulous hand — Mr. Inspector taking sidelong note of every hair of his head when it was bent down for the purpose — "Mr. Julius Handford, Exchequer Coffee-house, Palace Yard, Westminster."

"Staying there, I presume, sir?"

"Staying there."

"Consequently from the country?"

"Eh? Yes — from the country."

"Good-night, sir."

The satellite removed his arm and opened the wicket, and Mr. Julius Handford went out.

"Reserve!" said Mr. Inspector. "Take care of this piece of paper, keep him in view without giving offence, ascertain that he *is* staying there, and find out anything you can about him."

The satellite was gone; and Mr. Inspector, becoming once again the quiet Abbot of that Monastery, dipped his pen in his ink, and resumed his

books. The two friends who had watched him, more amused by the professional manner than suspicious of Mr. Julius Handford, inquired, before taking their departure too, whether he believed there was anything that really looked bad here?

The Abbot replied, with reticence, "Couldn't say. If a murder, anybody might have done it. Burglary or pocket-picking wanted 'prenticeship. Not so murder. We were all of us up to that. Had seen scores of people come to identify, and never saw one person struck in that particular way. Might, however, have been Stomach, and not Mind. If so, rum stomach. But to be sure there were rum everythings. Pity there was not a word of truth in that superstition about bodies bleeding when touched by the hand of the right person; you never got a sign out of bodies. You got row enough out of such as her — she was good for all night now" (referring here to the banging demands for the liver), "but you got nothing out of bodies, if it was ever so."

There being nothing more to be done until the Inquest was held next day, the friends went away together, and Gaffer Hexam and his son went their separate way. But, arriving at the last corner, Gaffer bade his boy go home while he turned into a red-curtained tavern, that stood dropsically bulging over the causeway, "for a half a pint."

The boy lifted the latch he had lifted before, and found his sister again seated before the fire at her work. Who raised her head upon his coming in and asking, —

"Where did you go, Liz?'

"I went out in the dark."

"There was no necessity for that. It was all right enough."

"One of the gentlemen, the one who didn't speak while I was there, looked hard at me. And I was afraid he might know what my face meant. But there! Don't mind me, Charley! I was all in a tremble of another sort when you owned to father you could write a little."

"Ah! But I made believe I wrote so badly as that it was odds if any one could read it. And when I wrote slowest, and smeared out with my finger most, father was best pleased, as he stood looking over me."

The girl put aside her work, and, drawing her seat close to his seat by the fire, laid her arm gently on his shoulder.

"You'll make the most of your time, Charley; won't you?"

"Won't I? Come! I like that. Don't I?"

"Yes, Charley, yes. You work hard at your learning, I know. And I work a little, Charley, and plan and contrive a little (wake out of my sleep contriving sometimes), how to get together a shilling now, and a shilling then, that shall make father believe you are beginning to earn a stray living alongshore."

"You are father's favorite, and can make him believe anything."

"I wish I could, Charley! For if I could make him believe that learning was a good thing, and that we might lead better lives, I should be a'most content to die."

"Don't talk stuff about dying, Liz."

She placed her hands on one another on his

shoulder, and, laying her rich brown cheek against them as she looked down at the fire, went on thoughtfully, —

"Of an evening, Charley, when you are at the school, and father's" —

"At the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters," the boy struck in, with a backward nod of his head towards the public-house.

"Yes. Then, as I sit a-looking at the fire, I seem to see in the burning coal — like where that glow is now" —

"That's gas, that is," said the boy, "coming out of a bit of a forest that's been under the mud that was under the water in the days of Noah's Ark. Look here! When I take the poker — so — and give it a dig" —

"Don't disturb it, Charley, or it'll be all in a blaze. It's that dull glow near it, coming and going, that I mean. When I look at it of an evening, it comes like pictures to me, Charley."

"Show us a picture," said the boy. "Tell us where to look."

"Ah! It wants my eyes, Charley."

"Cut away, then, and tell us what your eyes make of it."

"Why, there are you and me, Charley, when you were quite a baby that never knew a mother" —

"Don't go saying I never knew a mother," interposed the boy, "for I knew a little sister that was sister and mother both."

The girl laughed delightedly, and her eyes filled with pleasant tears, as he put both his arms round her waist, and so held her.

"There are you and me, Charley, when father

was away at work, and locked us out, for fear we should set ourselves afire or fall out of window, sitting on the door-sill, sitting on other doorsteps, sitting on the bank of a river, wandering about to get through the time. You are rather heavy to carry, Charley, and I am often obliged to rest. Sometimes we are sleepy, and fall asleep together in a corner, sometimes we are very hungry, sometimes we are a little frightened, but what is oftenest hard upon us is the cold. You remember, Charley?"

"I remember," said the boy, pressing her to him twice or thrice, "that I snuggled under a little shawl, and it was warm there."

"Sometimes it rains, and we creep under a boat, or the like of that; sometimes it's dark, and we get among the gaslights, sitting watching the people as they go along the streets. At last, up comes father and takes us home. And home seems such a shelter after out of doors! And father pulls my shoes off, and dries my feet at the fire and has me to sit by him while he smokes his pipe long after you are abed, and I notice that father's is a large hand, but never a heavy one when it touches me, and that father's is a rough voice, but never an angry one when it speaks to me. So, I grow up, and little by little father trusts me, and makes me his companion, and, let him be put out as he may, never once strikes me."

The listening boy gave a grunt here, as much as to say, "But he strikes *me*, though!"

"Those are some of the pictures of what is past, Charley."

"Cut away again," said the boy, "and give us a fortune-telling one; a future one."

"Well! There am I, continuing with father and holding to father, because father loves me, and I love father. I can't so much as read a book, because, if I had learned, father would have thought I was deserting him, and I should have lost my influence. I have not the influence I want to have. I cannot stop some dreadful things I try to stop, but I go on in the hope and trust that the time will come. In the mean while I know that I am in some things a stay to father, and that, if I was not faithful to him, he would — in revenge-like, or in disappointment, or both — go wild and bad!"

"Give us a touch of the fortune-telling pictures about me."

"I was passing on to them, Charley," said the girl, who had not changed her attitude since she began, and who now mournfully shook her head; "the others were all leading up. There are you" —

"Where am I, Liz?"

"Still in the hollow down by the flare."

"There seems to be the deuce and all in the hollow down by the flare," said the boy, glancing from her eyes to the brazier, which had a grisly skeleton look on its long thin legs.

"There are you, Charley, working your way, in secret from father, at the school; and you get prizes; and you go on better and better; and you come to be a — what was it you called it when you told me about that?"

"Ha, ha! Fortune-telling not know the name!" cried the boy, seeming to be rather relieved by this default on the part of the hollow down by the flare. "Pupil teacher."

"You come to be a pupil teacher, and you still

go on better and better, and you rise to be a master full of learning and respect. But the secret has come to father's knowledge long before, and it has divided you from father, and from me."

"No, it hasn't!"

"Yes, it has, Charley. I see, as plain as plain can be, that your way is not ours, and that even if father could be got to forgive your taking it (which he never could be), that way of yours would be darkened by our way. But I see too, Charley"—

"Still as plain as plain can be, Liz?" asked the boy playfully.

"Ah! Still! That it is a great work to have cut you away from father's life, and to have made a new and good beginning. So there am I, Charley, left alone with father, keeping him as straight as I can, watching for more influence than I have, and hoping that through some fortunate chance, or when he is ill, or when — I don't know what — I may turn him to wish to do better things."

"You said you couldn't read a book, Lizzie. Your library of books is the hollow down by the flare, I think."

"I should be very glad to be able to read real books. I feel my want of learning very much, Charley. But I should feel it much more, if I didn't know it to be a tie between me and father. — Hark! Father's tread!"

It being now past midnight, the bird of prey went straight to roost. At midday following he re-appeared at the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters, in the character, not new to him, of a witness before a Coroner's Jury.

Mr. Mortimer Lightwood, besides sustaining the

character of one of the witnesses, doubled the part with that of the eminent solicitor who watched the proceedings on behalf of the representatives of the deceased, as was duly recorded in the newspapers. Mr. Inspector watched the proceedings too, and kept his watching closely to himself. Mr. Julius Handford having given his right address, and being reported in solvent circumstances as to his bill, though nothing more was known of him at his hotel except that his way of life was very retired, had no summons to appear, and was merely present in the shades of Mr. Inspector's mind.

The case was made interesting to the public by Mr. Mortimer Lightwood's evidence touching the circumstances under which the deceased, Mr. John Harmon, had returned to England; exclusive private proprietorship in which circumstances was set up at dinner-tables, for several days, by Veneering, Twemlow, Podsnap, and all the Buffers: who all related them irreconcilably with one another, and contradicted themselves. It was also made interesting by the testimony of Job Potterson, the ship's steward, and one Mr. Jacob Kibble, a fellow-passenger, that the deceased Mr. John Harmon did bring over, in a hand-valise with which he did disembark, the sum realized by the forced sale of his little landed property, and that the sum exceeded in ready money, seven hundred pounds. It was further made interesting by the remarkable experiences of Jesse Hexam, in having rescued from the Thames so many dead bodies, and for whose behoof a rapturous admirer, subscribing himself "A Friend to Burial" (perhaps an undertaker), sent eighteen postage stamps, and five "Now Sir"s to the editor of the Times.

Upon the evidence adduced before them, the Jury found, That the body of Mr. John Harmon had been discovered floating in the Thames in an advanced state of decay, and much injured; and that the said Mr. John Harmon had come by his death under highly suspicious circumstances, though by whose act or in what precise manner there was no evidence before this Jury to show. And they appended to their verdict a recommendation to the Home Office (which Mr. Inspector appeared to think highly sensible), to offer a reward for the solution of the mystery. Within eight and forty hours a reward of One Hundred Pounds was proclaimed, together with a free pardon to any person or persons not the actual perpetrator or perpetrators, and so forth in due form.

This Proclamation rendered Mr. Inspector additionally studious, and caused him to stand meditating on river-stairs and causeways, and to go lurking about in boats, putting this and that together. But, according to the success with which you put this and that together, you get a woman and a fish apart, or a Mermaid in combination. And Mr. Inspector could turn out nothing better than a Mermaid, which no Judge and Jury would believe in.

Thus, like the tides on which it had been borne to the knowledge of men, the Harmon Murder — as it came to be popularly called — went up and down, and ebbed and flowed, now in the town, now in the country, now among palaces, now among hovels, now among lords and ladies and gentlefolks, now among laborers and hammerers and ballast-heavers, until at last, after a long interval of slack water, it got out to sea and drifted away.

CHAPTER IV.

THE R. WILFER FAMILY.

REGINALD WILFER is a name with rather a grand sound, suggesting, on first acquaintance, brasses in country churches, scrolls in stained-glass windows, and generally the De Wilfers who came over with the Conqueror. For, it is a remarkable fact in genealogy that no De Any ones ever came over with Anybody else.

But, the Reginald Wilfer family were of such commonplace extraction and pursuits, that their forefathers had for generations modestly subsisted on the Docks, the Excise Office, and the Custom House, and the existing R. Wilfer was a poor clerk. So poor a clerk, through having a limited salary and an unlimited family, that he had never yet attained the modest object of his ambition: which was, to wear a complete new suit of clothes, hat and boots included, at one time. His black hat was brown before he could afford a coat, his pantaloons were white at the seams and knees before he could buy a pair of boots, his boots had worn out before he could treat himself to new pantaloons, and, by the time he worked round to the hat again, that shining modern

article roofed in an ancient ruin of various periods.

If the conventional Cherub could ever grow up and be clothed, he might be photographed as a portrait of Wilfer. His chubby, smooth, innocent appearance was a reason for his being always treated with condescension when he was not put down. A stranger entering his own poor house at about ten o'clock P. M. might have been surprised to find him sitting up to supper. So boyish was he in his curves and proportions, that his old schoolmaster, meeting him in Cheapside, might have been unable to withstand the temptation of caning him on the spot. In short, he was the conventional cherub, after the supposititious shoot just mentioned, rather gray, with signs of care on his expression, and in decidedly insolvent circumstances.

He was shy, and unwilling to own to the name of Reginald, as being too aspiring and self-assertive a name. In his signature he used only the initial R., and imparted what it really stood for to none but chosen friends, under the seal of confidence. Out of this, the facetious habit had arisen, in the neighborhood surrounding Mincing Lane, of making Christian names for him of adjectives and participles beginning with R. Some of these were more or less appropriate: as Rusty, Retiring, Ruddy, Round, Ripe, Ridiculous, Ruminative; others derived their point from their want of application: as Raging, Rattling, Roaring, Raffish. But, his popular name was Rumty, which in a moment of inspiration had been bestowed upon him by a gentleman of convivial habits connected with the drug-market, as the beginning of a social chorus, his leading part in the

execution of which had led this gentleman to the Temple of Fame, and of which the whole expressive burden ran, —

> "Rumty, iddity, row dow dow,
> Sing toodlely, teedlely, bow wow wow."

Thus he was constantly addressed, even in minor notes on business, as "Dear Rumty;" in answer to which he sedately signed himself, "Yours truly, R. Wilfer."

He was clerk in the drug-house of Chicksey, Veneering, and Stobbles. Chicksey and Stobbles, his former masters, had both become absorbed in Veneering, once their traveller or commission agent: who had signalized his accession to supreme power by bringing into the business a quantity of plate-glass window and French-polished mahogany partition, and a gleaming and enormous door-plate.

R. Wilfer locked up his desk one evening, and, putting his bunch of keys in his pocket much as if it were his pegtop, made for home. His home was in the Holloway region north of London, and then divided from it by fields and trees. Between Battle Bridge and that part of the Holloway district in which he dwelt was a tract of suburban Sahara, where tiles and bricks were burned, bones were boiled, carpets were beat, rubbish was shot, dogs were fought, and dust was heaped by contractors. Skirting the border of this desert, by the way he took, when the light of its kiln fires made lurid smears on the fog, R. Wilfer sighed and shook his head.

"Ah, me!" said he, "what might have been is not what is!"

With which commentary on human life, indi-

cating an experience of it not exclusively his own, he made the best of his way to the end of his journey.

Mrs. Wilfer was, of course, a tall woman and an angular. Her lord being cherubic, she was necessarily majestic, according to the principle which matrimonially unites contrasts. She was much given to tying up her head in a pocket-handkerchief, knotted under the chin. This headgear, in conjunction with a pair of gloves worn within doors, she seemed to consider as at once a kind of armor against misfortune (invariably assuming it when in low spirits or difficulties), and as a species of full dress. It was, therefore, with some sinking of the spirit that her husband beheld her thus heroically attired, putting down her candle in the little hall, and coming down the doorsteps, through the little front court, to open the gate for him.

Something had gone wrong with the house door, for R. Wilfer stopped on the steps, staring at it, and cried, —

"Hal—loa!"

"Yes," said Mrs. Wilfer, "the man came himself with a pair of pincers, and took it off, and took it away. He said that as he had no expectation of ever being paid for it, and as he had an order for another LADIES' SCHOOL door-plate, it was better (burnished up) for the interests of all parties."

"Perhaps it was, my dear. What do you think?"

"You are master here, R. W.," returned his wife. "It is as you think; not as I do. Perhaps it might have been better if the man had taken the door too?"

"My dear, we couldn't have done without the door."

"Couldn't we?"

"Why, my dear! Could we?"

"It is as you think, R. W.; not as I do." With those submissive words, the dutiful wife preceded him down a few stairs to a little basement front room, half kitchen, half parlor, where a girl of about nineteen, with an exceedingly pretty figure and face, but with an impatient and petulant expression both in her face and in her shoulders (which in her sex and at her age are very expressive of discontent), sat playing draughts with a younger girl, who was the youngest of the House of Wilfer. Not to encumber this page by telling off the Wilfers in detail, and casting them up in the gross, it is enough for the present that the rest were what is called "out in the world" in various ways, and that they were Many. So many that, when one of his dutiful children called in to see him, R. Wilfer generally seemed to say to himself, after a little mental arithmetic, "Oh! here's another of 'em!" before adding aloud, "How de do, John?" or Susan, as the case might be.

"Well, Piggywiggies," said R. W., "how de do to-night? What I was thinking of, my dear," to Mrs. Wilfer, already seated in a corner with folded gloves, "was, that as we have let our first floor so well, and as we have now no place in which you could teach pupils, even if pupils"—

"The milkman said he knew of two young ladies of the highest respectability who were in search of a suitable establishment, and he took a card," interposed Mrs. Wilfer with severe monotony, as if she were reading an Act of Parliament aloud. "Tell your father whether it was last Monday, Bella."

"But we never heard any more of it, ma," said Bella, the elder girl.

"In addition to which, my dear," her husband urged, "if you have no place to put two young persons into" —

"Pardon me," Mrs. Wilfer again interposed, "they were not young persons. Two young ladies of the highest respectability. Tell your father, Bella, whether the milkman said so."

"My dear, it is the same thing."

"No, it is not," said Mrs. Wilfer, with the same impressive monotony. "Pardon me!"

"I mean, my dear, it is the same thing as to space. As to space. If you have no space in which to put two youthful fellow-creatures, however eminently respectable, which I do not doubt, where are those youthful fellow-creatures to be accommodated? I carry it no further than that. And solely looking at it," said her husband, making the stipulation at once in a conciliatory, complimentary, and argumentative tone — "as I am sure you will agree, my love — from a fellow-creature point of view, my dear."

"I have nothing more to say," returned Mrs. Wilfer, with a meek renunciatory action of her gloves. "It is as you think, R. W.; not as I do."

Here the huffing of Miss Bella, and the loss of three of her men at a swoop, aggravated by the coronation of an opponent, led to that young lady's jerking the draught-board and pieces off the table: which her sister went down on her knees to pick up.

"Poor Bella!" said Mrs. Wilfer.

"And poor Lavinia, perhaps, my dear?" suggested R. W.

"Pardon me," said Mrs. Wilfer, "no!"

It was one of the worthy woman's specialities that she had an amazing power of gratifying her splenetic or worldly-minded humors by extolling her own family: which she thus proceeded, in the present case, to do.

"No, R. W. Lavinia has not known the trial that Bella has known. The trial that your daughter Bella has undergone is, perhaps, without a parallel, and has been borne, I will say, nobly. When you see your daughter Bella in her black dress, which she alone of all the family wears, and when you remember the circumstances which have led to her wearing it, and when you know how those circumstances have been sustained, then, R. W., lay your head upon your pillow and say, 'Poor Lavinia!'"

Here Miss Lavinia, from her kneeling situation under the table, put in that she didn't want to be "poored by pa," or anybody else.

"I am sure you do not, my dear," returned her mother, "for you have a fine brave spirit. And your sister Cecilia has a fine brave spirit of another kind, a spirit of pure devotion, a beau-ti-ful spirit! The self-sacrifice of Cecilia reveals a pure and womanly character, very seldom equalled, never surpassed. I have now in my pocket a letter from your sister Cecilia, received this morning — received three months after her marriage, poor child! — in which she tells me that her husband must unexpectedly shelter under their roof his reduced aunt. 'But I will be true to him, mamma,' she touchingly writes; 'I will not leave him, I must not forget that he is my husband. Let his aunt

come!' If this is not pathetic, if this is not woman's devotion!" — The good lady waved her gloves in a sense of the impossibility of saying more, and tied the pocket-handkerchief over her head in a tighter knot under her chin.

Bella, who was now seated on the rug to warm herself, with her brown eyes on the fire, and a handful of her brown curls in her mouth, laughed at this, and then pouted and half cried.

"I am sure," said she, "though you have no feeling for me, pa, I am one of the most unfortunate girls that ever lived. You know how poor we are" (it is probable he did, having some reason to know it!), "and what a glimpse of wealth I had, and how it melted away, and how I am here in this ridiculous mourning — which I hate! — a kind of a widow who never was married. And yet you don't feel for me. — Yes, you do, yes, you do."

This abrupt change was occasioned by her father's face. She stopped to pull him down from his chair in an attitude highly favorable to strangulation, and to give him a kiss and a pat or two on the cheek.

"But you ought to feel for me, you know, pa."

"My dear, I do."

"Yes, and I say you ought to. If they had only left me alone, and told me nothing about it, it would have mattered much less. But that nasty Mr. Lightwood feels it his duty, as he says, to write and tell me what is in reserve for me, and then I am obliged to get rid of George Sampson."

Here Lavinia, rising to the surface with the last draughtman rescued, interposed, "You never cared for George Sampson, Bella."

"And did I say I did, miss?" Then, pouting

again, with the curls in her mouth: "George Sampson was very fond of me, and admired me very much, and put up with everything I did to him."

"You were rude enough to him," Lavinia again interposed.

"And did I say I wasn't, miss? I am not setting up to be sentimental about George Sampson. I only say George Sampson was better than nothing."

"You didn't show him that you thought even that," Lavinia again interposed.

"You are a chit and a little idiot," returned Bella, "or you wouldn't make such a dolly speech. What did you expect me to do? Wait till you are a woman, and don't talk about what you don't understand. You only show your ignorance!" Then, whimpering again, and at intervals biting the curls, and stopping to look how much was bitten off, "It's a shame! There never was such a hard case. I shouldn't care so much if it wasn't so ridiculous. It was ridiculous enough to have a stranger coming over to marry me, whether he liked it or not. It was ridiculous enough to know what an embarrassing meeting it would be, and how we never could pretend to have an inclination of our own, either of us. It was ridiculous enough to know I shouldn't like him — how *could* I like him, left to him in a will, like a dozen of spoons, with everything cut and dried beforehand, like orange chips? Talk of orange flowers indeed! I declare again it's a shame! Those ridiculous points would have been smoothed away by the money, for I love money, and want money — want it dreadfully. I hate to be poor, and we are degradingly poor, offensively poor, miserably poor, beastly poor. But here I am, left with all

the ridiculous parts of the situation remaining, and, added to them all, this ridiculous dress! And if the truth was known, when the Harmon murder was all over the town, and people were speculating on its being suicide, I dare say those impudent wretches at the clubs and places made jokes about the miserable creature's having preferred a watery grave to me. It's likely enough they took such liberties: I shouldn't wonder! I declare it's a very hard case indeed, and I am a most unfortunate girl. The idea of being a kind of a widow, and never having been married! And the idea of being as poor as ever, after all, and going into black, besides, for a man I never saw, and should have hated — as far as *he* was concerned — if I had seen!"

The young lady's lamentations were checked at this point by a knuckle knocking at the half-open door of the room. The knuckle had knocked two or three times already, but had not been heard.

"Who is it?" said Mrs. Wilfer, in her Act-of-Parliament manner. "Enter!"

A gentleman coming in, Miss Bella, with a short and sharp exclamation, scrambled off the hearth-rug, and massed the bitten curls together in their right place on her neck.

"The servant-girl had her key in the door as I came up, and directed me to this room, telling me I was expected. I am afraid I should have asked her to announce me."

"Pardon me," returned Mrs. Wilfer. "Not at all. Two of my daughters. R. W., this is the gentleman who has taken your first floor. He was so good as to make an appointment for to-night, when you would be at home."

A dark gentleman. Thirty at the utmost. An expressive, one might say handsome, face. A very bad manner. In the last degree constrained, reserved, diffident, troubled. His eyes were on Miss Bella for an instant, and then looked at the ground as he addressed the master of the house.

"Seeing that I am quite satisfied, Mr. Wilfer, with the rooms, and with their situation, and with their price, I suppose a memorandum between us of two or three lines, and a payment down, will bind the bargain? I wish to send in furniture without delay."

Two or three times during this short address, the cherub addressed had made chubby motions towards a chair. The gentleman now took it, laying a hesitating hand on a corner of the table, and with another hesitating hand lifting the crown of his hat to his lips, and drawing it before his mouth.

"The gentleman, R. W.," said Mrs. Wilfer, "proposes to take your apartments by the quarter. A quarter's notice on either side."

"Shall I mention, sir," insinuated the landlord, expecting it to be received as a matter of course, "the form of a reference?"

"I think," returned the gentleman after a pause, "that a reference is not necessary; neither, to say the truth, is it convenient, for I am a stranger in London. I require no reference from you, and perhaps, therefore, you will require none from me. That will be fair on both sides. Indeed, I show the greater confidence of the two, for I will pay in advance whatever you please, and I am going to trust my furniture here. Whereas, if you were in embarrassed circumstances — this is merely supposititious" —

Conscience causing R. Wilfer to color, Mrs. Wilfer, from a corner (she always got into stately corners) came to the rescue with a deep-toned "Per-fectly."

"— Why, then I — might lose it."

"Well!" observed R. Wilfer cheerfully, "money and goods are certainly the best of references."

"Do you think they *are* the best, pa?" asked Miss Bella in a low voice, and without looking over the shoulder, as she warmed her foot on the fender.

"Among the best, my dear."

"I should have thought, myself, it was so easy to add the usual kind of one," said Bella with a toss of her curls.

The gentleman listened to her with a face of marked attention, though he neither looked up nor changed his attitude. He sat, still and silent, until his future landlord accepted his proposals, and brought writing materials to complete the business. He sat, still and silent, while the landlord wrote.

When the agreement was ready in duplicate (the landlord having worked at it like some cherubic scribe, in what is conventionally called a doubtful, which means a not at all doubtful, Old Master), it was signed by the contracting parties, Bella looking on as scornful witness. The contracting parties were R. Wilfer and John Rokesmith, Esquire.

When it came to Bella's turn to sign her name, Mr. Rokesmith, who was standing, as he had sat, with a hesitating hand upon the table, looked at her stealthily, but narrowly. He looked at the pretty figure bending down over the paper and saying, "Where am I to go, pa? Here, in this corner?" He looked at the beautiful brown hair shading the coquettish face; he looked at the free dash of the

signature, which was a bold one for a woman's; and then they looked at one another.

"Much obliged to you, Miss Wilfer."

"Obliged?"

"I have given you so much trouble."

"Signing my name? Yes, certainly. But I am your landlord's daughter, sir."

As there was nothing more to do but pay eight sovereigns in earnest of the bargain, pocket the agreement, appoint a time for the arrival of his furniture and himself, and go, Mr. Rokesmith did that as awkwardly as it might be done, and was escorted by his landlord to the outer air. When R. Wilfer returned, candlestick in hand, to the bosom of his family, he found the bosom agitated.

"Pa," said Bella, "we have got a Murderer for a tenant."

"Pa," said Lavinia, "we have got a Robber."

"To see him unable, for his life, to look anybody in the face!" said Bella. "There never was such an exhibition."

"My dears," said their father, "he is a diffident gentleman, and I should say particularly so in the society of girls of your age."

"Nonsense, our age!" cried Bella impatiently. "What's that got to do with him?"

"Besides, we are not of the same age:—which age?" demanded Lavinia.

"Never *you* mind, Lavvy," retorted Bella; "you wait till you are of an age to ask such questions. Pa, mark my words! Between Mr. Rokesmith and me there is a natural antipathy and a deep distrust; and something will come of it!"

"My dear, and girls," said the cherub-patriarch,

"between Mr. Rokesmith and me there is a matter of eight sovereigns, and something for supper shall come of it, if you'll agree upon the article."

This was a neat and happy turn to give the subject, treats being rare in the Wilfer household, where a monotonous appearance of Dutch cheese at ten o'clock in the evening had been rather frequently commented on by the dimpled shoulders of Miss Bella. Indeed, the modest Dutchman himself seemed conscious of his want of variety, and generally came before the family in a state of apologetic perspiration. After some discussion on the relative merits of veal cutlet, sweetbread, and lobster, a decision was pronounced in favor of veal cutlet. Mrs. Wilfer then solemnly divested herself of her handkerchief and gloves, as a preliminary sacrifice to preparing the frying-pan, and R. W. himself went out to purchase the viand. He soon returned, bearing the same in a fresh cabbage-leaf, where it coyly embraced a rasher of ham. Melodious sounds were not long in rising from the frying-pan on the fire, or in seeming, as the firelight danced in the mellow halls of a couple of full bottles on the table, to play appropriate dance-music.

The cloth was laid by Lavvy. Bella, as the acknowledged ornament of the family, employed both her hands in giving her hair an additional wave while sitting in the easiest chair, and occasionally threw in a direction touching the supper: as "Very brown, ma," or, to her sister, "Put the salt-cellar straight, miss, and don't be a dowdy little puss."

Meantime, her father, chinking Mr. Rokesmith's

gold as he sat expectant between his knife and fork, remarked that six of those sovereigns came just in time for their landlord, and stood them in a little pile on the white tablecloth to look at.

"I hate our landlord!" said Bella.

But observing a fall in her father's face, she went and sat down by him at the table, and began touching up his hair with the handle of a fork. It was one of the girl's spoiled ways to be always arranging the family's hair — perhaps because her own was so pretty, and occupied so much of her attention.

"You deserve to have a house of your own; don't you, poor pa?"

"I don't deserve it better than another, my dear."

"At any rate, I, for one, want it more than another," said Bella, holding him by the chin, as she stuck his flaxen hair on end, "and I grudge this money going to the Monster that swallows up so much, when we all want — Everything. And if you say (as you want to say; I know you want to say so, pa), 'That's neither reasonable nor honest, Bella,' then I answer, 'Maybe not, pa — very likely — but it's one of the consequences of being poor, and of thoroughly hating and detesting to be poor, and that's my case.' Now you look lovely, pa. Why don't you always wear your hair like that? And here's the cutlet! If it isn't very brown, ma, I can't eat it, and must have a bit put back to be done expressly."

However, as it was brown, even to Bella's taste, the young lady graciously partook of it without reconsignment to the frying-pan, and also, in due

course, of the contents of the two bottles: whereof one held Scotch ale and the other rum. The latter perfume, with the fostering aid of boiling water and lemon-peel, diffused itself throughout the room, and became so highly concentrated around the warm fireside, that the wind passing over the house roof must have rushed off charged with a delicious whiff of it, after buzzing like a great bee at that particular chimney-pot.

"Pa," said Bella, sipping the fragrant mixture, and warming her favorite ankle; "when old Mr. Harmon made such a fool of me (not to mention himself, as he is dead), what do you suppose he did it for?"

"Impossible to say, my dear. As I have told you times out of number since his will was brought to light, I doubt if I ever exchanged a hundred words with the old gentleman. If it was his whim to surprise us, his whim succeeded. For he certainly did it."

"And I was stamping my foot and screaming when he first took notice of me; was I?" said Bella, contemplating the ankle before mentioned.

"You were stamping your little foot, my dear, and screaming with your little voice, and laying into me with your little bonnet, which you had snatched off for the purpose," returned her father, as the remembrance gave a relish to the rum; "you were doing this one Sunday morning when I took you out, because I didn't go the exact way you wanted, when the old gentleman, sitting on a seat near, said, 'That's a nice girl; that's a *very* nice girl; a promising girl!' And so you were, my dear."

"And then he asked my name, did he, pa?"

"Then he asked your name, my dear, and mine; and on other Sunday mornings, when we walked his way, we saw him again, and — and really that's all."

As that was all the rum and water too, or, in other words, as R. W. delicately signified that his glass was empty, by throwing back his head, and standing the glass upside down on his nose and upper lip, it might have been charitable in Mrs. Wilfer to suggest replenishment. But that heroine briefly suggesting "Bedtime" instead, the bottles were put away, and the family retired; she cherubically escorted, like some severe saint in a painting, or merely human matron allegorically treated.

"And by this time to-morrow," said Lavinia when the two girls were alone in their room, "we shall have Mr. Rokesmith here, and shall be expecting to have our throats cut."

"You needn't stand between me and the candle for all that," retorted Bella. "This is another of the consequences of being poor! The idea of a girl with a really fine head of hair having to do it by one flat candle and a few inches of looking-glass!"

"You caught George Sampson with it, Bella, bad as your means of dressing it are."

"You low little thing! Caught George Sampson with it! Don't talk about catching people, miss, till your own time for catching — as you call it — comes."

"Perhaps it has come," muttered Lavvy with a toss of her head.

"What did you say?" asked Bella very sharply. "What did you say, miss?"

Lavvy declining equally to repeat or to explain, Bella gradually lapsed over her hair-dressing into a soliloquy on the miseries of being poor, as exemplified in having nothing to put on, nothing to go out in, nothing to dress by, only a nasty box to dress at instead of a commodious dressing-table, and being obliged to take in suspicious lodgers. On the last grievance, as her climax, she laid great stress — and might have laid greater, had she known that, if Mr. Julius Handford had a twin brother upon earth, Mr. John Rokesmith was the man.

CHAPTER V.

BOFFIN'S BOWER.

Over against a London house, a corner house not far from Cavendish Square, a man with a wooden leg had sat for some years, with his remaining foot in a basket in cold weather, picking up a living on this wise: — Every morning, at eight o'clock, he stumped to the corner, carrying a chair, a clothes-horse, a pair of trestles, a board, a basket, and an umbrella, all strapped together. Separating these, the board and trestles became a counter; the basket supplied the few small lots of fruit and sweets that he offered for sale upon it, and became a foot-warmer; the unfolded clothes-horse displayed a choice collection of halfpenny ballads, and became a screen; and the stool planted within it became his post for the rest of the day. All weathers saw the man at the post. This is to be accepted in a double sense, for he contrived a back to his wooden stool, by placing it against the lamp-post. When the weather was wet, he put up his umbrella over his stock-in-trade, not over himself; when the weather was dry, he furled that faded article, tied it round with a piece of yarn, and laid it crosswise under the trestles: where it looked like an unwholesomely forced lettuce that

had lost in color and crispness what it had gained in size.

He had established his right to the corner by imperceptible prescription. He had never varied his ground an inch, but had in the beginning diffidently taken the corner upon which the side of the house gave. A howling corner in the winter-time, a dusty corner in the summer-time, an undesirable corner at the best of times. Shelterless fragments of straw and paper got up revolving storms there when the main street was at peace; and the water-cart, as if it were drunk or short-sighted, came blundering and jolting round it, making it muddy when all else was clean.

On the front of his sale-board hung a little placard, like a kettle-holder, bearing the inscription in his own small text, —

Errands gone
On with ﬂ
Delity By
Ladies and Gentlemen
I remain
Your humble Servt:
Silas Wegg.

He had not only settled it with himself, in course of time, that he was errand-goer by appointment to the house at the corner (though he received such commissions not half a dozen times in a year, and then only as some servant's deputy), but also that

he was one of the house's retainers, and owed vassalage to it, and was bound to leal and loyal interest in it. For this reason he always spoke of it as "Our House," and, though his knowledge of its affairs was mostly speculative and all wrong, claimed to be in its confidence. On similar grounds he never beheld an inmate at any one of its windows but he touched his hat. Yet, he knew so little about the inmates that he gave them names of his own invention: as "Miss Elizabeth," "Master George," "Aunt Jane," "Uncle Parker" — having no authority whatever for any such designations, but particularly the last — to which, as a natural consequence, he stuck with great obstinacy.

Over the house itself he exercised the same imaginary power as over its inhabitants and their affairs. He had never been in it, the length of a piece of fat black water-pipe which trailed itself over the area door into a damp stone passage, and had rather the air of a leech on the house that had "taken" wonderfully; but this was no impediment to his arranging it according to a plan of his own. It was a great dingy house, with a quantity of dim side-window and blank back premises, and it cost his mind a world of trouble so to lay it out as to account for everything in its external appearance. But this, once done, was quite satisfactory, and he rested persuaded that he knew his way about the house blindfold: from the barred garrets in the high roof to the two iron extinguishers before the main door — which seemed to request all lively visitors to have the kindness to put themselves out before entering.

Assuredly this stall of Silas Wegg's was the hardest little stall of all the sterile little stalls in

London. It gave you the faceache to look at his apples, the stomachache to look at his oranges, the toothache to look at his nuts. Of the latter commodity he had always a grim little heap, on which lay a little wooden measure which had no discernible inside, and was considered to represent the penn'orth appointed by Magna Charta. Whether from too much east wind or no — it was an easterly corner — the stall, the stock, and the keeper were all as dry as the desert. Wegg was a knotty man, and a close-grained, with a face carved out of very hard material, that had just as much play of expression as a watchman's rattle. When he laughed, certain jerks occurred in it, and the rattle sprung. Sooth to say, he was so wooden a man that he seemed to have taken his wooden leg naturally, and rather suggested to the fanciful observer that he might be expected — if his development received no untimely check — to be completely set up with a pair of wooden legs in about six months.

Mr. Wegg was an observant person, or, as he himself said, "took a powerful sight of notice." He saluted all his regular passers-by every day, as he sat on his stool backed up by the lamp-post; and on the adaptable character of these salutes he greatly plumed himself. Thus, to the rector, he addressed a bow compounded of lay deference and a slight touch of the shady preliminary meditation at church; to the doctor, a confidential bow, as to a gentleman whose acquaintance with his inside he begged respectfully to acknowledge; before the Quality he delighted to abase himself; and for Uncle Parker, who was in the army (at least, so he had settled it), he put his open hand to the side of his hat, in a

military manner which that angry-eyed, buttoned-up, inflammatory-faced old gentleman appeared but imperfectly to appreciate.

The only article in which Silas dealt, that was not hard, was gingerbread. On a certain day, some wretched infant having purchased the damp gingerbread horse (fearfully out of condition), and the adhesive bird-cage, which had been exposed for the day's sale, he had taken a tin box from under his stool to produce a relay of those dreadful specimens, and was going to look in at the lid, when he said to himself, pausing: "Oh! here you are again!"

The words referred to a broad, round-shouldered, one-sided old fellow in mourning, coming comically ambling towards the corner, dressed in a pea overcoat, and carrying a large stick. He wore thick shoes, and thick leather gaiters, and thick gloves like a hedger's. Both as to his dress and to himself, he was of an overlapping rhinoceros build, with folds in his cheeks, and his forehead, and his eyelids, and his lips, and his ears; but with bright, eager, childishly inquiring, gray eyes under his ragged eyebrows and broad-brimmed hat. A very odd-looking old fellow altogether.

"Here you are again," repeated Mr. Wegg, musing. "And what are you now? Are you in the Funns, or where are you? Have you lately come to settle in this neighborhood, or do you own to another neighborhood? Are you in independent circumstances, or is it wasting the motions of a bow on you? Come! I'll speculate! I'll invest a bow in you."

Which Mr. Wegg, having replaced his tin box, accordingly did, as he rose to bait his gingerbread

trap for some other devoted infant. The salute was acknowledged with, —

"Morning, sir! Morning! Morning!"

("Calls me Sir!" said Mr. Wegg to himself. "*He* won't answer. A bow gone!")

"Morning, morning, morning!"

"Appears to be rather a 'arty old cock too," said Mr. Wegg as before. "Good-morning to *you*, sir."

"Do you remember me, then?" asked his new acquaintance, stopping in his amble, one-sided, before the stall, and speaking in a pouncing way, though with great good-humor.

"I have noticed you go past our house, sir, several times in the course of the last week or so."

"Our house," repeated the other. "Meaning?" —

"Yes," said Mr. Wegg, nodding, as the other pointed the clumsy forefinger of his right glove at the corner house.

"Oh! Now, what," pursued the old fellow in an inquisitive manner, carrying his knotted stick in his left arm as if it were a baby, "what do they allow you now?"

"It's job work that I do for our house," returned Silas dryly, and with reticence; "it's not yet brought to an exact allowance."

"Oh! It's not yet brought to an exact allowance? No! It's not yet brought to an exact allowance. Oh! — Morning, morning, morning!"

"Appears to be rather a cracked old cock," thought Silas, qualifying his former good opinion, as the other ambled off. But, in a moment he was back again with the question, —

"How did you get your wooden leg?"

Mr. Wegg replied (tartly to this personal inquiry), "In an accident."

"Do you like it?"

"Well! I haven't got to keep it warm," Mr. Wegg made answer in a sort of desperation occasioned by the singularity of the question.

"He hasn't," repeated the other to his knotted stick as he gave it a hug; "he hasn't got — ha! ha! — to keep it warm! Did you ever hear of the name of Boffin?"

"No," said Mr. Wegg, who was growing restive under this examination. "I never did hear of the name of Boffin."

"Do you like it?"

"Why, no," retorted Mr. Wegg, again approaching desperation; "I can't say I do."

"Why don't you like it?"

"I don't know why I don't," retorted Mr. Wegg, approaching frenzy, "but I don't at all."

"Now, I'll tell you something that'll make you sorry for that," said the stranger, smiling. "My name's Boffin."

"I can't help it!" returned Mr. Wegg. Implying in his manner the offensive addition, "And if I could, I wouldn't."

"But there's another chance for you," said Mr. Boffin, smiling still. "Do you like the name of Nicodemus? Think it over. Nick, or Noddy."

"It is not, sir," Mr. Wegg rejoined, as he sat down on his stool, with an air of gentle resignation, combined with melancholy candor; "it is not a name as I could wish any one that I had a respect for to call *me* by; but there may be persons that would not view it with the same objections. — I

don't know why," Mr. Wegg added, anticipating another question.

"Noddy Boffin," said that gentleman. "Noddy. That's my name. Noddy — or Nick — Boffin. What's your name?"

"Silas Wegg. — I don't," said Mr. Wegg, bestirring himself to take the same precaution as before, "I don't know why Silas, and I don't know why Wegg."

"Now, Wegg," said Mr. Boffin, hugging his stick closer, "I want to make a sort of offer to you. Do you remember when you first see me?"

The wooden Wegg looked at him with a meditative eye, and also with a softened air, as descrying possibility of profit. "Let me think. I ain't quite sure, and yet I generally take a powerful sight of notice, too. Was it on a Monday morning, when the butcher boy had been to our house for orders, and bought a ballad of me, which, being unacquainted with the tune, I run it over to him?"

"Right, Wegg, right! But he bought more than one."

"Yes, to be sure, sir; he bought several; and wishing to lay out his money to the best, he took my opinion to guide his choice, and we went over the collection together. To be sure we did. Here was him as it might be, and here was myself as it might be, and there was you, Mr. Boffin, as you identically are, with your selfsame stick under your very same arm, and your very same back towards us. To — be — sure!" added Mr. Wegg, looking a little round Mr. Boffin, to take him in the rear, and identify this last extraordinary coincidence, "your wery selfsame back!"

"What do you think I was doing, Wegg?"

"I should judge, sir, that you might be glancing your eye down the street."

"No, Wegg. I was a-listening."

"Was you, indeed?" said Mr. Wegg dubiously.

"Not in a dishonorable way, Wegg, because you was singing to the butcher; and you wouldn't sing secrets to a butcher in the street, you know."

"It never happened that I did so yet, to the best of my remembrance," said Mr. Wegg cautiously. "But I might do it. A man can't say what he might wish to do some day or another." (This, not to release any little advantage he might derive from Mr. Boffin's avowal.)

"Well," repeated Boffin, "I was a-listening to you and to him. And what do you — You haven't got another stool, have you? I'm rather thick in my breath."

"I haven't got another, but you're welcome to this," said Wegg, resigning it. "It's a treat to me to stand."

"Lard!" exclaimed Mr. Boffin, in a tone of great enjoyment, as he settled himself down, still nursing his stick like a baby, "it's a pleasant place, this! And then to be shut in on each side with these ballads, like so many book-leaf blinkers! Why, it's delightful!"

"If I am not mistaken, sir," Mr. Wegg delicately hinted, resting a hand on his stall, and bending over the discursive Boffin, "you alluded to some offer or another that was in your mind?"

"I'm coming to it! All right. I'm coming to it! I was going to say that when I listened that morning, I listened with hadmiration amounting to haw.

I thought to myself, 'Here's a man with a wooden leg — a literary man with' " —

"N — not exactly so, sir," said Mr. Wegg.

"Why, you know every one of these songs by name and by tune, and if you want to read or to sing any one on 'em off straight, you've only to whip on your spectacles and do it!" cried Mr. Boffin. "I see you at it!"

"Well, sir," returned Mr. Wegg with a conscious inclination of the head; "we'll say literary, then."

"'A literary man — *with* a wooden leg — and all Print is open to him!' That's what I thought to myself that morning," pursued Mr. Boffin, leaning forward to describe, uncramped by the clothes-horse, as large an arc as his right arm could make; "'all Print is open to him!' And it is, ain't it?"

"Why, truly, sir," Mr. Wegg admitted with modesty; "I believe you couldn't show me the piece of English print that I wouldn't be equal to collaring and throwing."

"On the spot?" said Mr. Boffin.

"On the spot."

"I knowed it! Then consider this. Here am I, a man without a wooden leg, and yet all print is shut to me."

"Indeed, sir?" Mr. Wegg returned with increasing self-complacency. "Education neglected?"

"Neg-lected!" repeated Boffin with emphasis. "That ain't no word for it. I don't mean to say but what, if you showed me a B, I could so far give you change for it as to answer Boffin."

"Come, come, sir," said Mr. Wegg, throwing in a little encouragement, "that's something too."

"It's something," answered Mr. Boffin, "but I'll take my oath it ain't much."

"Perhaps it's not as much as could be wished by an inquiring mind, sir," Mr. Wegg admitted.

"Now, look here. I'm retired from business. Me and Mrs. Boffin — Henerietty Boffin — which her father's name was Henery, and her mother's name was Hetty, and so you get it — we live on a compittance, under the will of a diseased governor."

"Gentleman dead, sir?"

"Man alive, don't I tell you? A diseased governor? Now, it's too late for me to begin shovelling and sifting at alphabeds and grammar-books. I'm getting to be a old bird, and I want to take it easy. But I want some reading — some fine bold reading, some splendid book in a gorging Lord-Mayor's-Show of wollumes" (probably meaning gorgeous, but misled by association of ideas); "as'll reach right down your pint of view, and take time to go by you. How can I get that reading, Wegg? By," tapping him on the breast with the head of his stick, "paying a man truly qualified to do it, so much an hour (say twopence) to come and do it."

"Hem! Flattered, sir, I am sure," said Wegg, beginning to regard himself quite in a new light. "Hem! This is the offer you mentioned, sir?"

"Yes. Do you like it?"

"I am considering of it, Mr. Boffin."

"I don't," said Boffin in a free-handed manner, "want to tie a literary man — *with* a wooden leg — down too tight. A halfpenny an hour sha'n't part us. The hours are your own to choose, after you've done for the day with your house here. I live over Maiden Lane way — out Holloway direction — and you've only got to go East-and-by-North when you've finished here, and you're there. Twopence-

halfpenny an hour," said Boffin, taking a piece of chalk from his pocket, and getting off the stool to work the sum on the top of it in his own way; "two long 'uns and a short 'un — twopence-halfpenny; two short 'uns is a long 'un, and two two long 'uns is four long 'uns — making five long 'uns; six nights a week at five long 'uns a night," scoring them all down separately, "and you mount up to thirty long 'uns. A round 'un. Half a crown!"

Pointing to this result as a large and satisfactory one, Mr. Boffin smeared it out with his moistened glove, and sat down on the remains.

"Half a crown," said Wegg, meditating. "Yes. (It ain't much, sir.) Half a crown."

"Per week, you know."

"Per week. Yes. As to the amount of strain upon the intellect, now. Was you thinking at all of poetry?" Mr. Wegg inquired, musing.

"Would it come dearer?" Mr. Boffin asked.

"It would come dearer," Mr. Wegg returned. "For when a person comes to grind off poetry night after night, it is but right he should expect to be paid for its weakening effect on his mind."

"To tell you the truth, Wegg," said Boffin, "I wasn't thinking of poetry, except in so far as this: — If you was to happen now and then to feel yourself in the mind to tip me and Mrs. Boffin one of your ballads, why, then we should drop into poetry."

"I follow you, sir," said Wegg. "But not being a regular musical professional, I should be loath to engage myself for that; and therefore, when I dropped into poetry, I should ask to be considered so fur in the light of a friend."

At this Mr. Boffin's eyes sparkled, and he shook

Silas earnestly by the hand: protesting that it was more than he could have asked, and that he took it very kindly indeed.

"What do you think of the terms, Wegg?" Mr. Boffin then demanded with unconcealed anxiety.

Silas, who had stimulated this anxiety by his hard reserve of manner, and who had begun to understand his man very well, replied with an air as if he were saying something extraordinarily generous and great, —

"Mr. Boffin, I never bargain."

"So I should have thought of you!" said Mr Boffin admiringly.

"No, sir. I never did 'aggle, and I never will 'aggle. Consequently I meet you at once, free and fair, with — Done, for double the money!"

Mr. Boffin seemed a little unprepared for this conclusion, but assented, with the remark, "You know better what it ought to be than I do, Wegg," and again shook hands with him upon it.

"Could you begin to-night, Wegg?" he then demanded.

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Wegg, careful to leave all the eagerness to him. "I see no difficulty if you wish it. You are provided with the needful implements — a book, sir?"

"Bought him at a sale," said Mr. Boffin. "Eight wollumes. Red and gold. Purple ribbon in every wollume, to keep the place where you leave off. Do you know him?"

"The book's name, sir?" inquired Silas.

"I thought you might have knowed him without it," said Mr. Boffin, slightly disappointed. "His name is Decline-And-Fall-Off-The-Rooshan-Empire."

(Mr. Boffin went over these stones slowly and with much caution.)

"Ay, indeed!" said Mr. Wegg, nodding his head with an air of friendly recognition.

"You know him, Wegg?"

"I haven't been not to say right slap through him very lately," Mr. Wegg made answer, "having been otherways employed, Mr. Boffin. But know him? Old familiar declining and falling off the Rooshan? Rather, sir! Ever since I was not so high as your stick. Ever since my eldest brother left our cottage to enlist into the army. On which occasion, as the ballad that was made about it describes:

"Beside that cottage door, Mr. Boffin,
A girl was on her knees;
She held aloft a snowy scarf, Sir,
Which (my eldest brother noticed) fluttered in the breeze.
She breathed a prayer for him, Mr. Boffin;
A prayer he could not hear.
And my eldest brother lean'd upon his sword, Mr. Boffin,
And wiped away a tear."

Much impressed by this family circumstance, and also by the friendly disposition of Mr. Wegg, as exemplified in his so soon dropping into poetry, Mr. Boffin again shook hands with that ligneous sharper, and besought him to name his hour. Mr. Wegg named eight.

"Where I live," said Mr. Boffin, "is called The Bower. Boffin's Bower is the name Mrs. Boffin christened it when we come into it as a property. If you should meet with anybody that don't know it by that name (which hardly anybody does), when you've got nigh upon about a odd mile, or say and a quarter if you like, up Maiden Lane, Battle Bridge,

ask for Harmony Jail, and you'll be put right. I shall expect you, Wegg," said Mr. Boffin, clapping him on the shoulder with the greatest enthusiasm, "most jyfully. I shall have no peace or patience till you come. Print is now opening ahead of me. This night a literary man — *with* a wooden leg" — he bestowed an admiring look upon that decoration, as if it greatly enhanced the relish of Mr. Wegg's attainments — "will begin to lead me a new life! My fist again, Wegg. Morning, morning, morning!"

Left alone at his stall as the other ambled off, Mr. Wegg subsided into his screen, produced a small pocket-handkerchief of a penitentially scrubbing character, and took himself by the nose with a thoughtful aspect. Also while he still grasped that feature, he directed several thoughtful looks down the street after the retiring figure of Mr. Boffin. But profound gravity sat enthroned on Wegg's countenance. For, while he considered within himself that this was an old fellow of rare simplicity, that this was an opportunity to be improved, and that here might be money to be got beyond present calculation, still he compromised himself by no admission that his new engagement was at all out of his way, or involved the least element of the ridiculous. Mr. Wegg would even have picked a handsome quarrel with any one who should have challenged his deep acquaintance with those aforesaid eight volumes of Decline and Fall. His gravity was unusual, portentous, and immeasurable, not because he admitted any doubt of himself, but because he perceived it necessary to forestall any doubt of himself in others. And herein he ranged

with that very numerous class of impostors, who are quite as determined to keep up appearances to themselves as to their neighbors.

A certain loftiness, likewise, took possession of Mr. Wegg; a condescending sense of being in request as an official expounder of mysteries. It did not move him to commercial greatness, but rather to littleness, insomuch that, if it had been within the possibilities of things for the wooden measure to hold fewer nuts than usual, it would have done so that day. But, when night came, and with her veiled eyes beheld him stumping towards Boffin's Bower, he was elated too.

The Bower was as difficult to find as Fair Rosamond's without the clew. Mr. Wegg, having reached the quarter indicated, inquired for the Bower half a dozen times without the least success, until he remembered to ask for Harmony Jail. This occasioned a quick change in the spirits of a hoarse gentleman and a donkey, whom he had much perplexed.

"Why, yer mean Old Harmon's, do yer?" said the hoarse gentleman, who was driving his donkey in a truck, with a carrot for a whip. "Why didn't yer niver say so? Eddard and me is goin' by *him!* Jump in."

Mr. Wegg complied, and the hoarse gentleman invited his attention to the third person in company thus, —

"Now you look at Eddard's ears. What was it you named, agin? Whisper."

Mr. Wegg whispered, "Boffin's Bower."

"Eddard! (keep yer hi on his ears) cut away to Boffin's Bower!"

Edward, with his ears lying back, remained immovable.

"Eddard! (keep yer hi on his ears) out away to Old Harmon's."

Edward instantly pricked up his ears to the utmost, and rattled off at such a pace that Mr. Wegg's conversation was jolted out of him in a most dislocated state.

"Was-it-Ev-verajail?" asked Mr. Wegg, holding on.

"Not a proper jail, wot you and me would get committed to," returned his escort; "they giv' it the name, on accounts of Old Harmon living solitary there."

"And-why-did-they-callitharm-Ony?" asked Wegg.

"On accounts of his never agreeing with nobody. Like a speeches of chaff. Harmon's Jail; Harmony Jail. Working it round like."

"Doyouknow-Mist-Erboff-in?" asked Wegg.

"I should think so! Everybody do about here. Eddard knows him. (Keep yer hi on his ears.) Noddy Boffin, Eddard!"

The effect of the name was so very alarming, in respect of causing a temporary disappearance of Eddard's head, casting his hind hoofs in the air, greatly accelerating the pace and increasing the jolting, that Mr. Wegg was fain to devote his attention exclusively to holding on, and to relinquish his desire of ascertaining whether this homage to Boffin was to be considered complimentary or the reverse.

Presently Edward stopped at a gateway, and Wegg discreetly lost no time in slipping out at

the back of the truck. The moment he was landed, his late driver, with a wave of the carrot, said, "Supper, Eddard!" and he, the hind hoofs, the truck, and Edward, all seemed to fly into the air together, in a kind of apotheosis.

Pushing the gate, which stood ajar, Wegg looked into an enclosed space where certain tall, dark mounds rose high against the sky, and where the pathway to the Bower was indicated, as the moonlight showed, between two lines of broken crockery set in ashes. A white figure, advancing along this path, proved to be nothing more ghostly than Mr. Boffin, easily attired for the pursuit of knowledge, in an undress garment of short white smock-frock. Having received his literary friend with great cordiality, he conducted him to the interior of the Bower, and there presented him to Mrs. Boffin: — a stout lady of a rubicund and cheerful aspect, dressed (to Mr. Wegg's consternation) in a low evening dress of sable satin, and a large black velvet hat and feathers.

"Mrs. Boffin, Wegg," said Boffin, "is a high-flier at Fashion. And her make is such, that she does it credit. As to myself, I ain't yet as Fash'nable as I may come to be. Henerietty, old lady, this is the gentleman that's a-going to decline and fall off the Rooshan Empire."

"And I am sure I hope it'll do you both good," said Mrs. Boffin.

It was the queerest of rooms, fitted and furnished more like a luxurious amateur taproom than anything else within the ken of Silas Wegg. There were two wooden settles by the fire, one on either side of it, with a corresponding table before each.

On one of these tables the eight volumes were ranged flat, in a row, like a galvanic battery; on the other, certain squat case-bottles of inviting appearance seemed to stand on tiptoe to exchange glances with Mr. Wegg over a front row of tumblers and a basin of white sugar. On the hob a kettle steamed; on the hearth a cat reposed. Facing the fire between the settles, a sofa, a footstool, and a little table formed a centre-piece devoted to Mrs. Boffin. They were garish in taste and color, but were expensive articles of drawing-room furniture, that had a very odd look beside the settles and the flaring gaslight pendent from the ceiling. There was a flowery carpet on the floor; but, instead of reaching to the fireside, its glowing vegetation stopped short at Mrs. Boffin's footstool, and gave place to a region of sand and sawdust. Mr. Wegg also noticed, with admiring eyes, that, while the flowery land displayed such hollow ornamentation as stuffed birds and waxen fruits under glass shades, there were, in the territory where vegetation ceased, compensatory shelves on which the best part of a large pie, and likewise of a cold joint, were plainly discernible among other solids. The room itself was large, though low; and the heavy frames of its old-fashioned windows, and the heavy beams in its crooked ceiling, seemed to indicate that it had once been a house of some mark, standing alone in the country.

"Do you like it, Wegg?" asked Mr. Boffin in his pouncing manner.

"I admire it greatly, sir," said Wegg. "Peculiar comfort at this fireside, sir."

"Do you understand it, Wegg?"

"Why, in a general way, sir," Mr. Wegg was beginning slowly and knowingly, with his head stuck on one side, as evasive people do begin, when the other cut him short, —

"You *don't* understand it, Wegg, and I'll explain it. These arrangements is made by mutual consent between Mrs. Boffin and me. Mrs. Boffin, as I've mentioned, is a high-flier at Fashion: at present I'm not. I don't go higher than comfort, and comfort of the sort that I'm equal to the enjyment of. Well then. Where would be the good of Mrs. Boffin and me quarrelling over it? We never did quarrel before we come into Boffin's Bower as a property; why quarrel when we *have* come into Boffin's Bower as a property? So Mrs. Boffin, she keeps up her part of the room in her way; I keep up my part of the room in mine. In consequence of which we have, at once, Sociability (I should go melancholy mad without Mrs. Boffin), Fashion, and Comfort. If I get by degrees to be a high-flier at Fashion, then Mrs. Boffin will by degrees come for'arder. If Mrs. Boffin should ever be less of a dab at Fashion than she is at the present time, then Mrs. Boffin's carpet would go back'arder. If we should both continny as we are, why, then *here* we are, and give us a kiss, old lady."

Mrs. Boffin, who, perpetually smiling, had approached and drawn her plump arm through her lord's, most willingly complied. Fashion, in the form of her black velvet hat and feathers, tried to prevent it; but got deservedly crushed in the endeavor.

"So now, Wegg," said Mr. Boffin, wiping his mouth with an air of much refreshment, "you begin

to know us as we are. This is a charming spot, is the Bower, but you must get to appreciate it by degrees. It's a spot to find out the merits of, little by little, and a new 'un every day. There's a serpentining walk up each of the mounds, that gives you the yard and neighborhood changing every moment. When you get to the top, there's a view of the neighboring premises not to be surpassed. The premises of Mrs. Boffin's late father (Canine Provision Trade), you look down into, as if they was your own. And the top of the High Mound is crowned with a lattice-work Arbor, in which if you don't read out loud many a book in the summer, ay, and as a friend, drop many a time into poetry too, it sha'n't be my fault. Now, what'll you read on?"

"Thank you, sir," returned Wegg, as if there were nothing new in his reading at all. "I generally do it on gin and water."

"Keeps the organ moist, does it, Wegg?" asked Mr. Boffin with innocent eagerness.

"N-no, sir," replied Wegg coolly, "I should hardly describe it so, sir. I should say, mellers it. Mellers it is the word I should employ, Mr. Boffin."

His wooden conceit and craft kept exact pace with the delighted expectation of his victim. The visions rising before his mercenary mind, of the many ways in which this connection was to be turned to account, never obscured the foremost idea natural to a dull, overreaching man, that he must not make himself too cheap.

Mrs. Boffin's Fashion, as a less inexorable deity than the idol usually worshipped under that name, did not forbid her mixing for her literary guest,

or asking if he found the result to his liking. On his returning a gracious answer, and taking his place at the literary settle, Mr. Boffin began to compose himself as a listener, at the opposite settle, with exultant eyes.

"Sorry to deprive you of a pipe, Wegg," he said, filling his own, "but you can't do both together. Oh! and another thing I forgot to name! When you come in here of an evening, and look round you, and notice anything on a shelf that happens to catch your fancy, mention it."

Wegg, who had been going to put on his spectacles, immediately laid them down, with the sprightly observation, —

"You read my thoughts, sir. *Do* my eyes deceive me, or is that object up there a — a pie? It can't be a pie."

"Yes, it's a pie, Wegg," replied Mr. Boffin, with a glance of some little discomfiture at the Decline and Fall.

"*Have* I lost my smell for fruits, or is it a apple-pie, sir?" asked Wegg.

"It's a veal and ham pie," said Mr. Boffin.

"Is it indeed, sir? And it would be hard, sir, to name the pie that is a better pie than a weal and hammer," said Mr. Wegg, nodding his head emotionally.

"Have some, Wegg?"

"Thank you, Mr. Boffin, I think I will, at your invitation. I wouldn't at any other party's at the present juncture; but at yours, sir! — And meaty jelly, too, especially when a little salt, which is the case where there's ham, is mellering to the organ, is very mellering to the organ." Mr. Wegg

did not say what organ, but spoke with a cheerful generality.

So, the pie was brought down, and the worthy Mr. Boffin exercised his patience until Wegg, in the exercise of his knife and fork, had finished the dish; only profiting by the opportunity to inform Wegg that, although it was not strictly Fashionable to keep the contents of a larder thus exposed to view, he (Mr. Boffin) considered it hospitable; for the reason, that instead of saying, in a comparatively unmeaning manner, to a visitor, "There are such and such edibles downstairs; will you have anything up?" you took the bold, practical course of saying, "Cast your eye along the shelves, and if you see anything you like there, have it down."

And now Mr. Wegg at length pushed away his plate and put on his spectacles, and Mr. Boffin lighted his pipe and looked with beaming eyes into the opening world before him, and Mrs. Boffin reclined in a fashionable manner on her sofa: as one who would be part of the audience if she found she could, and would go to sleep if she found she couldn't.

"Hem!" began Wegg. "This, Mr. Boffin and Lady, is the first chapter of the first wollume of the Decline and Fall off"— Here he looked hard at the book, and stopped.

"What's the matter, Wegg?"

"Why, it comes into my mind, do you know, sir," said Wegg with an air of insinuating frankness (having first again looked hard at the book), "that you made a little mistake this morning, which I had meant to set you right in, only something put it

out of my head. I think you said Rooshan Empire, sir?"

"It is Rooshan; ain't it, Wegg?"

"No, sir. Roman. Roman."

"What's the difference, Wegg?"

"The difference, sir?" Mr. Wegg was faltering and in danger of breaking down, when a bright thought flashed upon him. "The difference, sir? There you place me in a difficulty, Mr. Boffin. Suffice it to observe, that the difference is best postponed to some other occasion when Mrs. Boffin does not honor us with her company. In Mrs. Boffin's presence, sir, we had better drop it."

Mr. Wegg thus came out of his disadvantage with quite a chivalrous air, and not only that, but, by dint of repeating with a manly delicacy, "In Mrs. Boffin's presence, sir, we had better drop it!" turned the disadvantage on Boffin, who felt that he had committed himself in a very painful manner.

Then Mr. Wegg, in a dry, unflinching way, entered on his task; going straight across country at everything that came before him; taking all the hard words, biographical and geographical; getting rather shaken by Hadrian, Trajan, and the Antonines; stumbling at Polybius (pronounced Polly Beeious, and supposed by Mr. Boffin to be a Roman virgin, and by Mrs. Boffin to be responsible for that necessity of dropping it); heavily unseated by Titus Antoninus Pius; up again and galloping smoothly with Augustus; finally, getting over the ground well with Commodus: who, under the appellation of Commodious, was held by Mr. Boffin to have been quite unworthy of his English origin, and "not to have acted up to his name" in his government of

the Roman people. With the death of this personage Mr. Wegg terminated his first reading; long before which consummation several total eclipses of Mrs. Boffin's candle behind her black velvet disk would have been very alarming, but for being regularly accompanied by a potent smell of burned pens when her feathers took fire, which acted as a restorative, and woke her. Mr. Wegg, having read on by rote and attached as few ideas as possible to the text, came out of the encounter fresh; but Mr. Boffin, who had soon laid down his unfinished pipe, and had ever since sat intently staring with his eyes and mind at the confounding enormities of the Romans, was so severely punished that he could hardly wish his literary friend good-night, and articulate "To-morrow."

"Commodious," gasped Mr. Boffin, staring at the moon, after letting Wegg out at the gate and fastening it: "Commodious fights in that wild-beast show seven hundred and thirty-five times, in one character only! As if that wasn't stunning enough, a hundred lions is turned into the same wild-beast show all at once! As if that wasn't stunning enough, Commodious, in another character, kills 'em all off in a hundred goes! As if that wasn't stunning enough, Vittle-us (and well named too) eats six millions' worth, English money, in seven months! Wegg takes it easy, but upon my soul to a old bird like myself these are scarers. And even now that Commodious is strangled, I don't see a way to our bettering ourselves." Mr. Boffin added, as he turned his pensive steps towards the Bower and shook his head, "I didn't think this morning there was half so many Scarers in Print. But I'm in for it now!"

CHAPTER VI.

CUT ADRIFT.

The Six Jolly Fellowship Porters, already mentioned as a tavern of a dropsical appearance, had long settled down into a state of hale infirmity. In its whole constitution it had not a straight floor, and hardly a straight line; but it had outlasted, and clearly would yet outlast, many a better-trimmed building, many a sprucer public-house. Externally, it was a narrow, lop-sided, wooden jumble of corpulent windows heaped one upon another as you might heap as many toppling oranges, with a crazy wooden veranda impending over the water; indeed, the whole house, inclusive of the complaining flagstaff on the roof, impended over the water, but seemed to have got into the condition of a faint-hearted diver, who has paused so long on the brink that he will never go in at all.

This description applies to the river frontage of the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters. The back of the establishment, though the chief entrance was there, so contracted that it merely represented, in its connection with the front, the handle of a flatiron set upright on its broadest end. This handle stood at the bottom of a wilderness of court and alley:

which wilderness pressed so hard and close upon the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters as to leave the hostelry not an inch of ground beyond its door. For this reason, in combination with the fact that the house was all but afloat at high water, when the Porters had a family wash the linen subjected to that operation might usually be seen drying on lines stretched across the reception-rooms and bedchambers.

The wood forming the chimney-pieces, beams, partitions, floors, and doors of the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters seemed in its old age fraught with confused memories of its youth. In many places it had become gnarled and riven, according to the manner of old trees; knots started out of it; and here and there it seemed to twist itself into some likeness of boughs. In this state of second childhood, it had an air of being in its own way garrulous about its early life. Not without reason was it often asserted, by the regular frequenters of the Porters, that when the light shone full upon the grain of certain panels, and particularly upon an old corner cupboard of walnut-wood in the bar, you might trace little forests there, and tiny trees like the parent tree, in full umbrageous leaf.

The bar of the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters was a bar to soften the human breast. The available space in it was not much larger than a hackney coach; but no one could have wished the bar bigger, that space was so girt in by corpulent little casks, and by cordial-bottles radiant with fictitious grapes in bunches, and by lemons in nets, and by biscuits in baskets, and by the polite beer-pulls that made low bows when customers were served with beer, and by the cheese in a snug corner, and by the land-

lady's own small table in a snugger corner near the fire, with the cloth everlastingly laid. This haven was divided from the rough world by a glass partition and a half-door, with a leaden sill upon it for the convenience of resting your liquor; but, over this half-door the bar's snugness so gushed forth, that, albeit customers drank there standing, in a dark and draughty passage where they were shouldered by other customers passing in and out, they always appeared to drink under an enchanting delusion that they were in the bar itself.

For the rest, both the tap and parlor of the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters gave upon the river, and had red curtains matching the noses of the regular customers, and were provided with comfortable fireside tin utensils, like models of sugar-loaf hats, made in that shape that they might, with their pointed ends, seek out for themselves glowing nooks in the depths of the red coals, when they mulled your ale, or heated for you those delectable drinks, Purl, Flip, and Dog's Nose. The first of these humming compounds was a speciality of the Porters, which, through an inscription on its door-posts, gently appealed to your feelings as, "The Early Purl House." For, it would seem that Purl must always be taken early; though whether for any more distinctly stomachic reason than that, as the early bird catches the worm, so the early purl catches the customer, cannot here be resolved. It only remains to add that in the handle of the flat-iron, and opposite the bar, was a very little room like a three-cornered hat, into which no direct ray of sun, moon, or star ever penetrated, but which was superstitiously regarded as a sanctuary replete with

comfort and retirement by gaslight, and on the doo of which was therefore painted its alluring name Cosey.

Miss Potterson, sole proprietor and manager o the Fellowship Porters, reigned supreme on he throne, the Bar, and a man must have drunk him self mad drunk indeed if he thought he could con test a point with her. Being known on her ow authority as Miss Abbey Potterson, some waterside heads, which (like the water) were none of th clearest, harbored muddled notions that, because o her dignity and firmness, she was named after, o in some sort related to, the Abbey at Westminste But, Abbey was only short for Abigail, by whic name Miss Potterson had been christened at Lim house Church, some sixty and odd years before.

"Now, you mind, you Riderhood," said Mis Abbey Potterson, with emphatic forefinger over th half-door, "the Fellowships don't want you at all and would rather by far have your room than you company; but if you were as welcome here as yo are not, you shouldn't even then have another dro of drink here this night, after this present pint o beer. So make the most of it."

"But you know, Miss Potterson," — this was sug gested very meekly, though, — "if I behave mysel you can't help serving me, miss."

"*Can't* I!" said Abbey with infinite expression.

"No, Miss Potterson; because, you see, th law" —

"*I* am the law here, my man," returned Mis Abbey, "and I'll soon convince you of that, if yo doubt it at all."

"I never said I did doubt it at all, Miss Abbey."

"So much the better for you."

Abbey the supreme threw the customer's half-pence into the till, and, seating herself in her fire-side chair, resumed the newspaper she had been reading. She was a tall, upright, well-favored woman, though severe of countenance, and had more of the air of a schoolmistress than mistress of the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters. The man on the other side of the half-door was a waterside man with a squinting leer, and he eyed her as if he were one of her pupils in disgrace.

"You're cruel hard upon me, Miss Potterson."

Miss Potterson read her newspaper with contracted brows, and took no notice until he whispered, —

"Miss Potterson! Ma'am! Might I have half a word with you?"

Deigning then to turn her eyes sideways towards the suppliant, Miss Potterson beheld him knuckling his low forehead, and ducking at her with his head, as if he were asking leave to fling himself head foremost over the half-door, and alight on his feet in the bar.

"Well!" said Miss Potterson, with a manner as short as she herself was long, "say your half-word. Bring it out."

"Miss Potterson! Ma'am! Would you 'sxcuse me taking the liberty of asking, is it my character that you take objections to?"

"Certainly," said Miss Potterson.

"Is it that you're afraid of" —

"I am not afraid of *you*," interposed Miss Potterson, "if you mean that."

"But I humbly don't mean that, Miss Abbey."

"Then what do you mean?"

"You really are so cruel hard upon me! What I was going to make inquiries was no more than, might you have any apprehensions — leastway beliefs or suppositions — that the company's property mightn't be altogether to be considered safe, if I used the house too regular?"

"What do you want to know for?"

"Well, Miss Abbey, respectfully meaning no offence to you, it would be some satisfaction to a man's mind to understand why the Fellowship Porters is not to be free to such as me, and is to be free to such as Gaffer."

The face of the hostess darkened with some shadow of perplexity as she replied: "Gaffer has never been where you have been."

"Signifying in Quod, miss? Perhaps not. But he may have merited it. He may be suspected of far worse than ever I was."

"Who suspects him?"

"Many, perhaps. One, beyond all doubts. I do."

"*You* are not much," said Miss Abbey Potterson, knitting her brows again with disdain.

"But I was his pardner. Mind you, Miss Abbey, I was his pardner. As such, I know more of the ins and outs of him than any person living does. Notice this! I am the man that was his pardner, and I am the man that suspects him."

"Then," suggested Miss Abbey, though with a deeper shade of perplexity than before, "you criminate yourself."

"No, I don't, Miss Abbey. For how does it stand? It stands this way. When I was his pardner, I couldn't never give him satisfaction. Why couldn't I never give him satisfaction? Be-

cause my luck was bad, because I couldn't find many enough of 'em. How was his luck? Always good. Notice this! Always good! Ah! There's a many games, Miss Abbey, in which there's chance, but there's a many others in which there's skill too, mixed along with it."

"That Gaffer has a skill in finding what he finds, who doubts, man?" asked Miss Abbey.

"A skill in purwiding what he finds, perhaps," said Riderhood, shaking his evil head.

Miss Abbey knitted her brow at him as he darkly leered at her.

"If you're out upon the river pretty nigh every tide, and if you want to find a man or woman in the river, you'll greatly help your luck, Miss Abbey, by knocking a man or woman on the head aforehand, and pitching 'em in."

"Gracious Lud!" was the involuntary exclamation of Miss Potterson.

"Mind you!" returned the other, stretching forward over the half-door to throw his words into the bar; for his voice was as if the head of his boat's mop was down his throat; "I say so, Miss Abbey! And mind you! I'll follow him up, Miss Abbey! And mind you! I'll bring him to book at last, if it's twenty year hence, I will! Who's he, to be favored along of his daughter? Ain't I got a daughter of my own?"

With that flourish, and seeming to have talked himself rather more drunk, and much more ferocious than he had begun by being, Mr. Riderhood took up his pint pot, and swaggered off to the taproom.

Gaffer was not there, but a pretty strong muster

of Miss Abbey's pupils were, who exhibited, when occasion required, the greatest docility. On the clock's striking ten, and Miss Abbey's appearing at the door, and addressing a certain person in a faded scarlet jacket with "George Jones, your time's up! I told your wife you should be punctual," Jones submissively rose, gave the company good-night, and retired. At half-past ten, on Miss Abbey's looking in again, and saying, "William Williams, Bob Glamour, and Jonathan, you are all due," Williams, Bob, and Jonathan with similar meekness took their leave and evaporated. Greater wonder than these, when a bottle-nosed person in a glazed hat had, after some considerable hesitation, ordered another glass of gin and water of the attendant potboy, and when Miss Abbey, instead of sending it, appeared in person, saying, "Captain Joey, you have had as much as will do you good," not only did the captain feebly rub his knees and contemplate the fire without offering a word of protest, but the rest of the company murmured, "Ay, ay, Captain! Miss Abbey's right; you be guided by Miss Abbey, Captain." Nor was Miss Abbey's vigilance in any wise abated by this submission, but rather sharpened; for, looking round on the deferential faces of her school, and descrying two other young persons in need of admonition, she thus bestowed it: "Tom Tootle, it's time for a young fellow who's going to be married next month to be at home and asleep. And you needn't nudge him, Mr. Jack Mullins, for I know your work begins early to-morrow, and I say the same to you. So come! Good-night, like good lads!" Upon which, the blushing Tootle looked to Mullins, and

the blushing Mullins looked to Tootle, on the question who should rise first, and finally both rose together, and went out on the broad grin, followed by Miss Abbey; in whose presence the company did not take the liberty of grinning likewise.

In such an establishment, the white-aproned potboy, with his shirt-sleeves arranged in a tight roll on each bare shoulder, was a mere hint of the possibility of physical force, thrown out as a matter of state and form. Exactly at the closing hour, all the guests who were left filed out in the best order: Miss Abbey standing at the half-door of the bar, to hold a ceremony of review and dismissal. All wished Miss Abbey good-night, and Miss Abbey wished good-night to all, except Riderhood. The sapient potboy, looking on officially, then had the conviction borne in upon his soul, that the man was evermore outcast and excommunicate from the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters.

"You Bob Gliddery," said Miss Abbey to this potboy, "run round to Hexam's, and tell his daughter Lizzie that I want to speak to her."

With exemplary swiftness Bob Gliddery departed and returned. Lizzie, following him, arrived as one of the two female domestics of the Fellowship Porters arranged on the snug little table by the bar fire Miss Potterson's supper of hot sausages and mashed potatoes.

"Come in and sit ye down, girl," said Miss Abbey. "Can you eat a bit?"

"No, thank you, miss. I have had my supper."

"I have had mine too, I think," said Miss Abbey, pushing away the untasted dish, "and more than enough of it. I am put out, Lizzie."

"I am very sorry for it, miss."

"Then why, in the name of Goodness," quoth Miss Abbey sharply, "do you do it?"

"*I* do it, miss!"

"There, there! Don't look astonished. I ought to have begun with a word of explanation, but it's my way to make short cuts at things. I always was a pepperer. You Bob Gliddery there, put the chain upon the door, and get ye down to your supper."

With an alacrity that seemed no less referable to the pepperer fact than to the supper fact, Bob obeyed, and his boots were heard descending towards the bed of the river.

"Lizzie Hexam, Lizzie Hexam," then began Miss Potterson, "how often have I held out to you the opportunity of getting clear of your father, and doing well?"

"Very often, miss."

"Very often? Yes! And I might as well have spoken to the iron funnel of the strongest sea-going steamer that passes the Fellowship Porters."

"No, miss," Lizzie pleaded; "because that would not be thankful, and I am."

"I vow and declare I am half ashamed of myself for taking such an interest in you," said Miss Abbey pettishly, "for I don't believe I should do it if you were not good-looking. Why ain't you ugly?"

Lizzie merely answered this difficult question with an apologetic glance.

"However, you ain't," resumed Miss Potterson "so it's no use going into that. I must take you as I find you. Which, indeed, is what I've done. And you mean to say you are still obstinate?"

"Not obstinate, miss, I hope."

"Firm (I suppose you call it) then?"

"Yes, miss. Fixed like."

"Never was an obstinate person yet, who would own to the word!" remarked Miss Potterson, rubbing her vexed nose. "I'm sure I would, if I was obstinate; but I am a pepperer, which is different. Lizzie Hexam, Lizzie Hexam, think again. Do you know the worst of your father?"

"Do I know the worst of father!" she repeated, opening her eyes.

"Do you know the suspicions to which your father makes himself liable? Do you know the suspicions that are actually about against him?"

The consciousness of what he habitually did oppressed the girl heavily, and she slowly cast down her eyes.

"Say, Lizzie. Do you know?" urged Miss Abbey.

"Please to tell me what the suspicions are, miss" — she asked after a silence, with her eyes upon the ground.

"It's not an easy thing to tell a daughter, but it must be told. It is thought by some, then, that your father helps to their death a few of those that he finds dead."

The relief of hearing what she felt sure was a false suspicion, in place of the expected real and true one, so lightened Lizzie's breast for the moment, that Miss Abbey was amazed at her demeanor. She raised her eyes quickly, shook her head, and, in a kind of triumph, almost laughed.

"They little know father who talk like that!"

("She takes it," thought Miss Abbey, "very

quietly. She takes it with extraordinary quie
ness!")

"And perhaps," said Lizzie as a recollectic
flashed upon her, "it is some one who has a grudg
against father; some one who has threatene
father! Is it Riderhood, miss?"

"Well; yes, it is."

"Yes! He was father's partner, and fath
broke with him, and now he revenges himsel
Father broke with him when I was by, and he w
very angry at it. And besides, Miss Abbey!-
Will you never, without strong reason, let pass yo
lips what I am going to say?"

She bent forward to say it in a whisper.

"I promise," said Miss Abbey.

"It was on the night when the Harmon murd
was found out, through father, just above bridg
And just below bridge, as we were sculling hom
Riderhood crept out of the dark in his boat. An
many and many times afterwards, when such gre
pains were taken to come to the bottom of th
crime, and it never could be come near, I thoug
in my own thoughts, could Riderhood himself ha
done the murder, and did he purposely let fath
find the body? It seemed a'most wicked and cru
to so much as think such a thing; but, now that h
tries to throw it upon father, I go back to it as if
was a truth. Can it be a truth that was put in
my mind by the dead?"

She asked this question rather of the fire than
the hostess of the Fellowship Porters, and looke
round the little bar with troubled eyes.

But Miss Potterson, as a ready schoolmistre
accustomed to bring her pupils to book, set th

matter in a light that was essentially of this world.

"You poor deluded girl," she said, "don't you see that you can't open your mind to particular suspicions of one of the two, without opening your mind to general suspicions of the other? They had worked together. Their goings-on had been going on for some time. Even granting that it was as you have had in your thoughts, what the two had done together would come familiar to the mind of one."

"You don't know father, miss, when you talk like that. Indeed, indeed, you don't know father."

"Lizzie, Lizzie," said Miss Potterson, "leave him. You needn't break with him altogether, but leave him. Do well away from him; not because of what I have told you to-night — we'll pass no judgment upon that, and we'll hope it may not be — but because of what I have urged on you before. No matter whether it's owing to your good looks or not, I like you, and I want to serve you. Lizzie, come under my direction. Don't fling yourself away, my girl, but be persuaded into being respectable and happy."

In the sound good feeling and good sense of her entreaty, Miss Abbey had softened into a soothing tone, and had even drawn her arm round the girl's waist. But she only replied, "Thank you, thank you! I can't. I won't. I must not think of it. The harder father is borne upon, the more he needs me to lean on."

And then Miss Abbey, who, like all hard people when they do soften, felt that there was considerable compensation owing to her, underwent re-action and became frigid.

"I have done what I can," she said, "and you must go your way. You make your bed, and you must lie on it. But tell your father one thing: he must not come here any more."

"Oh, miss, will you forbid him the house where I know he's safe?"

"The Fellowships," returned Miss Abbey, "has itself to look to, as well as others. It has been hard work to establish order here, and make the Fellowships what it is, and it is daily and nightly hard work to keep it so. The Fellowships must not have a taint upon it that may give it a bad name. I forbid the house to Riderhood, and I forbid the house to Gaffer. I forbid both equally. I find, from Riderhood and you together, that there are suspicions against both men, and I'm not going to take upon myself to decide betwixt them. They are both tarred with a dirty brush, and I can't have the Fellowships tarred with the same brush. That's all *I* know."

"Good-night, miss," said Lizzie Hexam sorrowfully.

"Hah!—Good-night!" returned Miss Abbey with a shake of her head.

"Believe me, Miss Abbey, I am truly grateful all the same."

"I can believe a good deal," returned the stately Abbey, "so I'll try to believe that too, Lizzie."

No supper did Miss Potterson take that night, and only half her usual tumbler of hot port negus. And the female domestics—two robust sisters, with staring black eyes, shining flat red faces, blunt noses, and strong black curls like dolls—interchanged the sentiment that missis had had her hair

combed the wrong way by somebody. And the pot-boy afterwards remarked that he hadn't been "so rattled to bed" since his mother had systematically accelerated his retirement to rest with a poker.

The chaining of the door behind her, as she went forth, disenchanted Lizzie Hexam of that first relief she had felt. The night was black and shrill, the riverside wilderness was melancholy, and there was a sound of casting out in the rattling of the iron links, and the grating of the bolts and staples under Miss Abbey's hand. As she came beneath the lowering sky, a sense of being involved in a murky shade of Murder dropped upon her; and, as the tidal swell of the river broke at her feet without her seeing how it gathered, so her thoughts startled her by rushing out of an unseen void and striking at her heart.

Of her father's being groundlessly suspected she felt sure. Sure. Sure. And yet, repeat the word inwardly as often as she would, the attempt to reason out and prove that she was sure, always came after it and failed. Riderhood had done the deed, and entrapped her father. Riderhood had not done the deed, but had resolved in his malice to turn against her father the appearances that were ready to his hand to distort. Equally and swiftly, upon either putting of the case, followed the frightful possibility that her father, being innocent, yet might come to be believed guilty. She had heard of people suffering Death for bloodshed of which they were afterwards proved pure, and those ill-fated persons were not, first, in that dangerous wrong in which her father stood. Then, at the best, the beginning of his being set apart, whispered

against and avoided, was a certain fact. It dated from that very night. And as the great black river, with its dreary shores, was soon lost to her view in the gloom, so she stood on the river's brink unable to see into the vast blank misery of a life suspected, and fallen away from by good and bad, but knowing that it lay there dim before her, stretching away to the great ocean, Death.

One thing only was clear to the girl's mind. Accustomed from her very babyhood promptly to do the thing that could be done — whether to keep out weather, to ward off cold, to postpone hunger, or what not — she started out of her meditation, and ran home.

The room was quiet, and the lamp burned on the table. In the bunk in the corner her brother lay asleep. She bent over him softly, kissed him, and came to the table.

"By the time of Miss Abbey's closing, and by the run of the tide, it must be one. Tide's running up. Father, at Chiswick, wouldn't think of coming down till after the turn, and that's at half after four. I'll call Charley at six. I shall hear the church clock strike, as I sit here."

Very quietly she placed a chair before the scanty fire, and sat down in it, drawing her shawl about her.

"Charley's hollow down by the flare is not there now. Poor Charley!"

The clock struck two, and the clock struck three, and the clock struck four, and she remained there, with a woman's patience and her own purpose. When the morning was well on between four and five, she slipped off her shoes (that her going about

might not wake Charley), trimmed the fire sparingly, put water on to boil, and set the table for breakfast. Then she went up the ladder, lamp in hand, and came down again, and glided about and about, making a little bundle. Lastly, from her pocket, and from the chimney-piece, and from an inverted basin on the highest shelf, she brought halfpence, a few sixpences, fewer shillings, and fell to laboriously and noiselessly counting them, and setting aside one little heap. She was still so engaged when she was startled by, —

"Hal-loa!" From her brother, sitting up in bed.

"You made me jump, Charley."

"Jump! Didn't you make *me* jump, when I opened my eyes a moment ago, and saw you sitting there like the ghost of a girl-miser, in the dead of the night!"

"It's not the dead of the night, Charley. It's nigh six in the morning."

"Is it, though? But what are you up to, Liz?"

"Still telling your fortune, Charley."

"It seems to be a precious small one, if that's it," said the boy. "What are you putting that little pile of money by itself for?"

"For you, Charley."

"What do you mean?"

"Get out of bed, Charley, and get washed and dressed, and then I'll tell you."

Her composed manner, and her low voice, always had an influence over him. His head was soon in a basin of water, and out of it again, and staring at her through a storm of towelling.

"I never," towelling at himself as if he were his bitterest enemy, "saw such a girl as you are. What *is* the move, Liz?"

"Are you almost ready for breakfast, Charley?"

"You can pour it out. Hal-loa! I say? And a bundle?"

"And a bundle, Charley."

"You don't mean it's for me, too?"

"Yes, Charley; I do indeed."

More serious of face, and more slow of action, than he had been, the boy completed his dressing, and came and sat down at the little breakfast-table, with his eyes amazedly directed to her face.

"You see, Charley dear, I have made up my mind that this is the right time for your going away from us. Over and above all the blessed change of by and by, you'll be much happier, and do much better, even so soon as next month. Even so soon as next week."

"How do you know I shall?"

"I don't quite know how, Charley, but I do." In spite of her unchanged manner of speaking, and her unchanged appearance of composure, she scarcely trusted herself to look at him, but kept her eyes employed on the cutting and buttering of his bread, and on the mixing of his tea, and other such little preparations. "You must leave father to me, Charley — I will do what I can with him — but you must go."

"You don't stand upon ceremony, I think," grumbled the boy, throwing his bread and butter about, in an ill-humor.

She made no answer.

"I tell you what," said the boy then, bursting out into an angry whimpering, "you're a selfish jade, and you think there's not enough for three of us, and you want to get rid of me."

"If you believe so, Charley — yes, then I believe too that I am a selfish jade, and that I think there's not enough for three of us, and that I want to get rid of you."

It was only when the boy rushed at her, and threw his arms round her neck, that she lost her self-restraint. But she lost it then, and wept over him.

"Don't cry, don't cry! I am satisfied to go, Liz; I am satisfied to go. I know you send me away for my good."

"Oh, Charley, Charley, Heaven above us knows I do!"

"Yes, yes. Don't mind what I said. Don't remember it. Kiss me."

After a silence she loosed him, to dry her eyes and regain her strong quiet influence.

"Now listen, Charley dear. We both know it must be done, and I alone know there is good reason for its being done at once. Go straight to the school, and say that you and I agreed upon it — that we can't overcome father's opposition — that father will never trouble them, but will never take you back. You are a credit to the school, and you will be a greater credit to it yet, and they will help you to get a living. Show what clothes you have brought, and what money, and say that I will send some more money. If I can get some in no other way, I will ask a little help of those two gentlemen who came here that night."

"I say!" cried her brother quickly. "Don't you have it of that chap that took hold of me by the chin! Don't you have it of that Wrayburn one!"

Perhaps a slight additional tinge of red flashed

up into her face and brow, as with a nod she laid a hand upon his lips to keep him silently attentive.

"And, above all things, mind this, Charley! Be sure you always speak well of father. Be sure you always give father his full due. You can't deny that, because father has no learning himself, he is set against it in you; but favor nothing else against him, and be sure you say — as you know — that your sister is devoted to him. And if you should ever happen to hear anything said against father that is new to you, it will not be true. Remember, Charley! It will not be true."

The boy looked at her with some doubt and surprise, but she went on again without heeding it.

"Above all things, remember! It will not be true! I have nothing more to say, Charley dear, except, be good, and get learning, and only think of some things in the old life here, as if you had dreamed them in a dream last night. Good-by, my darling!"

Though so young, she infused into these parting words a love that was far more like a mother's than a sister's, and before which the boy was quite bowed down. After holding her to his breast with a passionate cry, he took up his bundle and darted out at the door, with an arm across his eyes.

The white face of the winter day came sluggishly on, veiled in a frosty mist; and the shadowy ships in the river slowly changed to black substances; and the sun, blood-red on the eastern marshes behind dark masts and yards, seemed filled with the ruins of a forest it had set on fire. Lizzie, looking for her father, saw him coming, and stood upon the causeway that he might see her.

He had nothing with him but his boat, and came on apace. A knot of those amphibious human creatures, who appear to have some mysterious power of extracting a subsistence out of tidal water by looking at it, were gathered together about the causeway. As her father's boat grounded, they became contemplative of the mud and dispersed themselves. She saw that the mute avoidance had begun.

Gaffer saw it too, in so far as that he was moved, when he set foot on shore, to stare around him. But he promptly set to work to haul up his boat, and make her fast, and take the sculls and rudder and rope out of her. Carrying these with Lizzie's aid, he passed up to his dwelling.

"Sit close to the fire, father dear, while I cook your breakfast. It's all ready for cooking, and only been waiting for you. You must be frozen."

"Well, Lizzie, I ain't of a glow; that's certain. And my hands seemed nailed through to the sculls. See how dead they are!" Something suggestive in their color, and perhaps in her face, struck him as he held them up; he turned his shoulder and held them down to the fire.

"You were not out in the perishing night, I hope, father?"

"No, my dear. Lay aboard a barge, by a blazing coal fire. — Where's that boy?"

"There's a drop of brandy for your tea, father, if you'll put it in while I turn this bit of meat. If the river was to get frozen, there would be a deal of distress; wouldn't there, father?"

"Ah! there's always enough of that," said Gaffer, dropping the liquor into his cup from a

squat black bottle, and dropping it slowly, that i might seem more; "distress is forever a-goin about, like sut in the air. — Ain't that boy u yet?"

"The meat's ready now, father. Eat it while it' hot and comfortable. After you have finished, we' turn round to the fire and talk."

But he perceived that he was evaded, and, havin thrown a hasty angry glance towards the bunl plucked at a corner of her apron and asked, —

"What's gone with that boy?"

"Father, if you'll begin your breakfast, I'll s by and tell you."

He looked at her, stirred his tea, and took two c three gulps, then cut at his piece of hot steak wit his case-knife, and said, eating, —

"Now then. What's gone with that boy?"

"Don't be angry, dear. It seems, father, that h has quite a gift of learning."

"Unnat'ral young beggar!" said the paren shaking his knife in the air.

"— And that having this gift, and not bein equally good at other things, he has made shift t get some schooling."

"Unnat'ral young beggar!" said the parent agai with his former action.

"— And that knowing you have nothing to spar father, and not wishing to be a burden on you, h gradually made up his mind to go seek his fortun out of learning. He went away this mornin father, and he cried very much at going, and h hoped you would forgive him."

"Let him never come anigh me to ask me my fo giveness," said the father, again emphasizing h

words with the knife. "Let him never come within sight of my eyes, nor yet within reach of my arm. His own father ain't good enough for him. He's disowned his own father. His own father therefore disowns him for ever and ever, as a unnat'ral young beggar."

He had pushed away his plate. With the natural need of a strong rough man in anger to do something forcible, he now clutched his knife overhand, and struck downward with it at the end of every succeeding sentence. As he would have struck with his own clinched fist if there had chanced to be nothing in it.

"He's welcome to go. He's more welcome to go than to stay. But let him never come back. Let him never put his head inside that door. And let you never speak a word more in his favor, or you'll disown your own father likewise, and what your father says of him he'll have to come to say of you. Now I see why them men yonder held aloof from me. They says to one another, 'Here comes the man as ain't good enough for his own son!' Lizzie!" —

But she stopped him with a cry. Looking at her, he saw her, with a face quite strange to him, shrinking back against the wall, with her hands before her eyes.

"Father, don't! I can't bear to see you striking with it. Put it down!"

He looked at the knife; but, in his astonishment, still held it.

"Father, it's too horrible. Oh, put it down, put it down!"

Confounded by her appearance and exclamation,

he tossed it away, and stood up with his open hand held out before him.

"What's come to you, Liz? Can you think I would strike at you with a knife?"

"No, father, no; you would never hurt me."

"What should I hurt?"

"Nothing, dear father. On my knees, I am certain, in my heart and soul I am certain, nothing But it was too dreadful to bear; for it looked" — her hands covering her face again — "oh, it looked" —

"What did it look like?"

The recollection of his murderous figure, combining with her trial of last night, and her trial of the morning, caused her to drop at his feet without having answered.

He had never seen her so before. He raised her with the utmost tenderness, calling her the best of daughters, and "my poor pretty creetur," and laid her head upon his knee, and tried to restore her. But failing, he laid her head gently down again, got a pillow and placed it under her dark hair, and sought on the table for a spoonful of brandy. There being none left, he hurriedly caught up the empty bottle, and ran out at the door.

He returned as hurriedly as he had gone, with the bottle still empty. He kneeled down by her, took her head on his arm, and moistened her lips with a little water into which he dipped his fingers: saying fiercely, as he looked around, now over this shoulder now over that, —

"Have we got a pest in the house? Is there summat deadly sticking to my clothes? What's let loose upon us? Who loosed it?"

CHAPTER VII.

MR. WEGG LOOKS AFTER HIMSELF.

Silas Wegg, being on his road to the Roman Empire, approaches it by way of Clerkenwell. The time is early in the evening; the weather moist and raw. Mr. Wegg finds leisure to make a little circuit, by reason that he folds his screen early, now that he combines another source of income with it, and also that he feels it due to himself to be anxiously expected at the Bower. "Boffin will get all the eagerer for waiting a bit," says Silas, screwing up, as he stumps along, first his right eye, and then his left. Which is something superfluous in him, for Nature has already screwed both pretty tight.

"If I get on with him as I expect to get on," Silas pursues, stumping and meditating, "it wouldn't become me to leave it here. It wouldn't be respectable." Animated by this reflection, he stumps faster, and looks a long way before him, as a man with an ambitious project in abeyance often will do.

Aware of a working-jeweller population taking sanctuary about the church in Clerkenwell, Mr. Wegg is conscious of an interest in, and a respect for, the neighborhood. But his sensations in this regard halt as to their strict morality, as he halts

in his gait; for they suggest the delights of a coat of invisibility in which to walk off safely with the precious stones and watch-cases, but stop short of any compunction for the people who would lose the same.

Not, however, towards the "shops" where cunning artificers work in pearls and diamonds, and gold and silver, making their hands so rich, that the enriched water in which they wash them is bought for the refiners; — not towards these does Mr. Wegg stump, but, towards the poorer shops of small retail traders in commodities to eat and drink and keep folks warm, and of Italian frame-makers, and of barbers, and of brokers, and of dealers in dogs and singing-birds. From these, in a narrow and dirty street devoted to such callings, Mr. Wegg selects one dark shop-window with a tallow candle dimly burning in it, surrounded by a muddle of objects vaguely resembling pieces of leather and dry stick, but among which nothing is resolvable into anything distinct, save the candle itself in its old tin candlestick, and two preserved frogs fighting a small-sword duel. Stumping with fresh vigor, he goes in at the dark greasy entry, pushes a little greasy, dark, reluctant side-door, and follows the door into the little dark, greasy shop. It is so dark that nothing can be made out in it, over a little counter, but another tallow candle in another old tin candlestick, close to the face of a man stooping low in a chair.

Mr. Wegg nods to the face, "Good-evening."

The face looking up is a sallow face with weak eyes, surmounted by a tangle of reddish-dusty hair. The owner of the face has no cravat on, and has

opened his tumbled shirt collar to work with the more ease. For the same reason he has no coat on: only a loose waistcoat over his yellow linen. His eyes are like the overtried eyes of an engraver, but he is not that; his expression and stoop are like those of a shoemaker, but he is not that.

"Good-evening, Mr. Venus. Don't you remember?"

With slowly dawning remembrance, Mr. Venus rises, and holds his candle over the little counter, and holds it down towards the legs, natural and artificial, of Mr. Wegg.

"To be *sure!*" he says then. "How do you do?"

"Wegg, you know," that gentleman explains.

"Yes, yes," says the other. "Hospital amputation?"

"Just so," says Mr. Wegg.

"Yes, yes," quoth Venus. "How do you do? Sit down by the fire, and warm your — your other one."

The little counter being so short a counter that it leaves the fireplace, which would have been behind it if it had been longer, accessible, Mr. Wegg sits down on a box in front of the fire, and inhales a warm and comfortable smell which is not the smell of the shop. "For that," Mr. Wegg inwardly decides, as he takes a corrective sniff or two, "is musty, leathery, feathery, cellary, gluey, gummy, and," with another sniff, "as it might be, strong of old pairs of bellows."

"My tea is drawing, and my muffin is on the hob, Mr. Wegg: will you partake?"

It being one of Mr. Wegg's guiding rules in life

always to partake, he says he will. But the littl shop is so excessively dark, is stuck so full of blac shelves and brackets and nooks and corners, that h sees Mr. Venus's cup and saucer only because it i close under the candle, and does not see from wha mysterious recess Mr. Venus produces another fo himself, until it is under his nose. Concurrently Wegg perceives a pretty little dead bird lying o the counter, with its head drooping on one sid against the rim of Mr. Venus's saucer, and a long stiff wire piercing its breast. As if it were Coc Robin, the hero of the ballad, and Mr. Venus wer the sparrow with his bow and arrow, and Mr. Weg were the fly with his little eye.

Mr. Venus dives and produces another muffin, ye untoasted; taking the arrow out of the breast o Cock Robin, he proceeds to toast it on the end o that cruel instrument. When it is brown, he dive again, and produces butter, with which he com pletes his work.

Mr. Wegg, as an artful man who is sure of hi supper by and by, presses muffin on his host t soothe him into a compliant state of mind, or, a one might say, to grease his works. As the muffin disappear, little by little, the black shelves an nooks and corners begin to appear, and Mr. Weg gradually acquires an imperfect notion that ove against him on the chimney-piece is a Hindoo bab in a bottle, curved up with his big head tucke under him, as though he would instantly throw summerset if the bottle were large enough.

When he deems Mr. Venus's wheels sufficientl lubricated, Mr. Wegg approaches his object by ask ing, as he lightly taps his hands together, to expres an undesigning frame of mind, —

"And how have I been going on this long time, Mr. Venus?"

"Very bad," says Mr. Venus uncompromisingly.

"What! Am I still at home?" asks Wegg with an air of surprise.

"Always at home."

This would seem to be secretly agreeable to Wegg, but he veils his feelings, and observes, "Strange. To what do you attribute it?"

"I don't know," replies Venus, who is a haggard, melancholy man, speaking in a weak voice of querulous complaint, "to what to attribute it, Mr. Wegg. I can't work you into a miscellaneous one, nohow. Do what I will, you can't be got to fit. Anybody with a passable knowledge would pick you out at a look, and say, — 'No go! Don't match!'"

"Well, but hang it, Mr. Venus," Wegg expostulates with some little irritation, "that can't be personal and peculiar in *me*. It must often happen with miscellaneous ones."

"With ribs (I grant you) always. But not else. When I prepare a miscellaneous one, I know beforehand that I can't keep to nature, and be miscellaneous with ribs, because every man has his own ribs, and no other man's will go with them; but elseways I can be miscellaneous. I have just sent home a Beauty — a perfect Beauty — to a school of art. One leg Belgian, one leg English, and the pickings of eight other people in it. Talk of not being qualified to be miscellaneous! By rights you *ought* to be, Mr. Wegg."

Silas looks as hard at his one leg as he can in the dim light, and after a pause sulkily opines "that it must be the fault of the other people. Or how do

you mean to say it comes about?" he dema
impatiently.

"I don't know how it comes about. Stand u
minute. Hold the light." Mr. Venus takes, fr
a corner by his chair, the bones of a leg and f
beautifully pure, and put together with exqui
neatness. These he compares with Mr. Weg
leg; that gentleman looking on as if he were be
measured for a riding boot. "No, I don't kn
how it is, but so it is. You have got a twist in t
bone, to the best of my belief. *I* never saw
likes of you."

Mr. Wegg having looked distrustfully at his o
limb, and suspiciously at the pattern with which
has been compared, makes the point, —

"I'll bet a pound that ain't an English one!"

"An easy wager, when we run so much i
foreign! No, it belongs to that French gentlema

As he nods towards a point of darkness beh
Mr. Wegg, the latter, with a slight start, looks rou
for "that French gentleman," whom he at len
descries to be represented (in a very workmanl
manner) by his ribs only, standing on a shelf
another corner, like a piece of armor or a pair
stays.

"Oh!" says Mr. Wegg, with a sort of sense
being introduced; "I dare say you were all ri
enough in your own country, but I hope no ob
tions will be taken to my saying that the Fren
man was never yet born as I should wish to matc

At this moment the greasy door is violen
pushed inward, and a boy follows it, who says, a
having let it slam, —

"Come for the stuffed canary."

"It's three and ninepence," returns Venus. "Have you got the money?"

The boy produces four shillings. Mr. Venus, always in exceedingly low spirits and making whimpering sounds, peers about for the stuffed canary. On his taking the candle to assist his search, Mr. Wegg observes that he has a convenient little shelf near his knees, exclusively appropriated to skeleton hands, which have very much the appearance of wanting to lay hold of him. From these Mr. Venus rescues the canary in a glass case, and shows it to the boy.

"There!" he whimpers. "There's animation! On a twig, making up his mind to hop! Take care of him; he's a lovely specimen. — And three is four."

The boy gathers up his change, and has pulled the door open by a leather strap nailed to it for the purpose, when Venus cries out, —

"Stop him! Come back, you young villain! You've got a tooth among them halfpence."

"How was I to know I'd got it? You giv' it me. I don't want none of your teeth; I've got enough of my own." So the boy pipes, as he selects it from his change, and throws it on the counter.

"Don't sauce *me* in the wicious pride of your youth," Mr. Venus retorts pathetically. "Don't hit *me* because you see I'm down. I'm low enough without that. It dropped into the till, I suppose. They drop into everything. There was two in the coffee-pot at breakfast-time. Molars."

"Very well, then," argues the boy, "what do you call names for?"

To which Mr. Venus only replies, shaking h shock of dusty hair, and winking his weak ey "Don't sauce *me* in the wicious pride of yo youth; don't hit *me* because you see I'm dow You've no idea how small you'd come out, if I h the articulating of you."

This consideration seems to have its effect on t boy, for he goes out grumbling.

"Oh, dear me, dear me!" sighs Mr. Ven heavily, snuffing the candle, "the world that s peared so flowery has ceased to blow! You casting your eye round the shop, Mr. Wegg. I me show you a light. My working bench. M young man's bench. A Wice. Tools. Bon warious. Skulls, warious. Preserved Indian bal African ditto. Bottled preparations, warious. Eve thing within reach of your hand, in good preser tion. The mouldy ones atop. What's in th hampers over them, again, I don't quite rememb Say, human warious. Cats. Articulated Engli baby. Dogs. Ducks. Glass eyes, warious. Mu mied bird. Dried cuticle, warious. Oh, dear m That's the general panoramic view."

Having so held and waved the candle as that these heterogeneous objects seemed to come forwa obediently when they were named, and then ret again, Mr. Venus despondently repeats, "Oh, d me, dear me!" resumes his seat, and, with droopi despondency upon him, falls to pouring himself more tea.

"Where am I?" asks Mr. Wegg.

"You're somewhere in the back-shop across t yard, sir; and, speaking quite candidly, I wish never bought you of the Hospital Porter."

"Now, look here, what did you give for me?"

"Well," replies Venus, blowing his tea: his head and face peering out of the darkness, over the smoke of it, as if he were modernizing the old original rise in his family: "you were one of a warious lot, and I don't know."

Silas puts his point in the improved form of "What will you take for me?"

"Well," replies Venus, still blowing his tea, "I'm not prepared, at a moment's notice, to tell you, Mr. Wegg."

"Come! According to your own account, I'm not worth much," Wegg reasons persuasively.

"Not for miscellaneous working in, I grant you, Mr. Wegg; but you might turn out valuable yet as a" — here Mr. Venus takes a gulp of tea, so hot that it makes him choke, and sets his weak eyes watering — "as a Monstrosity, if you'll excuse me."

Repressing an indignant look, indicative of anything but a disposition to excuse him, Silas pursues his point.

"I think you know me, Mr. Venus, and I think you know I never bargain."

Mr. Venus takes gulps of hot tea, shutting his eyes at every gulp, and opening them again in a spasmodic manner; but does not commit himself to assent.

"I have a prospect of getting on in life, and elevating myself by my own independent exertions," says Wegg feelingly, "and I shouldn't like — I tell you openly I should *not* like — under such circumstances, to be what I may call dispersed, a part of me here, and a part of me there, but should wish to collect myself like a genteel person."

"It's a prospect at present, is it, Mr. Weg
Then you haven't got the money for a deal ab
you? Then I'll tell you what I'll do with y
I'll hold you over. I am a man of my word, a
you needn't be afraid of my disposing of you.
hold you over. That's a promise. Oh, dear
dear me!"

Fain to accept his promise, and wishing to p
pitiate him, Mr. Wegg looks on as he sighs a
pours himself out more tea, and then says, tryi
to get a sympathetic tone into his voice, —

"You seem very low, Mr. Venus. Is busin
bad?"

"Never was so good."

"Is your hand out at all?"

"Never was so well in. Mr. Wegg, I'm not o
first in the trade, but I'm *the* trade. You may
and buy a skeleton at the West End if you like, a
pay the West End price, but it'll be my putti
together. I've as much to do as I can possibly
with the assistance of my young man, and I tak
pride and a pleasure in it."

Mr. Venus thus delivers himself, his right ha
extended, and his smoking saucer in his left ha
protesting as though he were going to burst int
flood of tears.

"That ain't a state of things to make you l
Mr. Venus."

"Mr. Wegg, I know it ain't. Mr. Wegg, not
name myself as a workman without an equal, I
gone on improving myself in my knowledge
Anatomy, till both by sight and by name I'm p
fect. Mr. Wegg, if you was brought here loose i
bag to be articulated, I'd name your smallest bo

blindfold equally with your largest, as fast as I could pick 'em out, and I'd sort 'em all, and sort your wertebræ, in a manner that would equally surprise and charm you."

"Well," remarks Silas (though not quite so readily as last time), "*that* ain't a state of things to be low about. — Not for *you* to be low about, leastways."

"Mr. Wegg, I know it ain't: Mr. Wegg, I know it ain't. But it's the heart that lowers me, it is the heart! Be so good as take and read that card out loud."

Silas receives one from his hand, which Venus takes from a wonderful litter in a drawer, and putting on his spectacles, reads, —

"'Mr. Venus,'"

"Yes. Go on."

"'Preserver of Animals and Birds,'"

"Yes. Go on."

"'Articulator of human bones.'"

"That's it," with a groan. "That's it! Mr. Wegg, I'm thirty-two, and a bachelor. Mr. Wegg, I love her. Mr. Wegg, she is worthy of being loved by a Potentate!" Here Silas is rather alarmed by Mr. Venus's springing to his feet in the hurry of his spirits, and haggardly confronting him with his hand on his coat collar; but Mr. Venus, begging pardon, sits down again, saying, with the calmness of despair, —

"She objects to the business."

"Does she know the profits of it?"

"She knows the profits of it, but she don't appreciate the art of it, and she objects to it. 'I do not wish,' she writes in her own handwriting, 'to

regard myself, nor yet to be regarded, in that bo
light.'"

Mr. Venus pours himself out more tea, with
look and in an attitude of the deepest dese
tion.

"And so a man climbs to the top of the tree, h
Wegg, only to see that there's no lookout when h
up there! I sit here of a night surrounded by t
lovely trophies of my art, and what have they do
for me? Ruined me. Brought me to the pass
being informed that 'she does not wish to rega
herself, nor yet to be regarded, in that bony light!
Having repeated the fatal expressions, Mr. Ven
drinks more tea by gulps, and offers an explanati
of his doing so.

"It lowers me. When I'm equally lowered
over, lethargy sets in. By sticking to it till one
two in the morning, I get oblivion. Don't let
detain you, Mr. Wegg. I'm not company for a
one."

"It is not on that account," says Silas, rising, "
because I've got an appointment. It's time I was
Harmon's."

"Eh?" said Mr. Venus. "Harmon's, up Bat
Bridge way?"

Mr. Wegg admits that he is bound for that por

"You ought to be in a good thing, if you
worked yourself in there. There's lots of mon
going there."

"To think," says Silas, "that you should catch
up so quick, and know about it. Wonderful!"

"Not at all, Mr. Wegg. The old gentlem
wanted to know the nature and worth of eve
thing that was found in the dust; and many's t

bone, and feather, and what not, that he's brought to me."

"Really, now!"

"Yes. (Oh, dear me, dear me!) And he's buried quite in this neighborhood, you know. Over yonder."

Mr. Wegg does not know, but he makes as if he did, by responsively nodding his head. He also follows with his eyes, and the toss of Venus's head: as if to seek a direction to over yonder.

"I took an interest in that discovery in the river," says Venus. "(She hadn't written her cutting refusal at that time.) I've got up there—Never mind, though."

He had raised the candle at arm's length towards one of the dark shelves, and Mr. Wegg had turned to look, when he broke off.

"The old gentleman was well known all round here. There used to be stories about his having hidden all kinds of property in those dust mounds. I suppose there was nothing in 'em. Probably you know, Mr. Wegg?"

"Nothing in 'em," says Wegg, who has never heard a word of this before.

"Don't let me detain you. Good-night!"

The unfortunate Mr. Venus gives him a shake of the hand with a shake of his own head, and drooping down in his chair, proceeds to pour himself out more tea. Mr. Wegg, looking back over his shoulder as he pulls the door open by the strap, notices that the movement so shakes the crazy shop, and so shakes a momentary flare out of the candle, as that the babies — Hindoo, African, and British — the "human warious," the French gentleman, the green

glass-eyed cats, the dogs, the ducks, and all the rest of the collection, show for an instant as if paralytically animated; while even poor little Cock Robin at Mr. Venus's elbow turns over on his innocent side. Next moment Mr. Wegg is stumping under the gaslights and through the mud.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. BOFFIN IN CONSULTATION.

WHOSOEVER had gone out of Fleet Street into the Temple at the date of this history, and had wandered disconsolate about the Temple, until he stumbled on a dismal churchyard, and had looked up at the dismal windows commanding that churchyard until at the most dismal window of them all he saw a dismal boy, would in him have beheld, at one grand comprehensive swoop of the eye, the managing clerk, junior clerk, common-law clerk, conveyancing clerk, Chancery clerk, every refinement and department of clerk, of Mr. Mortimer Lightwood, erewhile called in the newspapers eminent solicitor.

Mr. Boffin having been several times in communication with this clerkly essence, both on its own ground and at the Bower, had no difficulty in identifying it when he saw it up in its dusty eyry. To the second floor, on which the window was situated, he ascended, much pre-occupied in mind by the uncertainties besetting the Roman Empire, and much regretting the death of the amiable Pertinax; who only last night had left the Imperial affairs in a state of great confusion, by falling a victim to the fury of the prætorian guards.

"Morning, morning, morning!" said Mr. Boffin, with a wave of his hand, as the office door was opened by the dismal boy, whose appropriate name was Blight. "Governor in?"

"Mr. Lightwood gave you an appointment, sir, I think?"

"I don't want him to give it, you know," returned Mr. Boffin; "I'll pay my way, my boy."

"No doubt, sir. Would you walk in? Mr. Lightwood ain't in at the present moment, but I expect him back very shortly. Would you take a seat in Mr. Lightwood's room, sir, while I look over our Appointment Book?" Young Blight made a great show of fetching from his desk a long thin manuscript volume with a brown-paper cover, and running his finger down the day's appointments, murmuring, "Mr. Aggs, Mr. Baggs, Mr. Caggs, Mr. Daggs, Mr. Faggs, Mr. Gaggs, Mr. Boffin. Yes, sir; quite right. You are a little before your time, sir. Mr. Lightwood will be in directly."

"I'm not in a hurry," said Mr. Boffin.

"Thank you, sir. I'll take the opportunity, if you please, of entering your name in our Callers' Book for the day." Young Blight made another great show of changing the volume, taking up a pen, sucking it, dipping it, and running over previous entries before he wrote. As, "Mr. Alley, Mr. Balley, Mr. Calley, Mr. Dalley, Mr. Falley, Mr. Galley, Mr. Halley, Mr. Lalley, Mr. Malley. And Mr. Boffin."

"Strict system here; eh, my lad?" said Mr. Boffin as he was booked.

"Yes, sir," returned the boy. "I couldn't get on without it."

By which he probably meant that his mind would have been shattered to pieces without this fiction of an occupation. Wearing in his solitary confinement no fetters that he could polish, and being provided with no drinking-cup that he could carve, he had fallen on the device of ringing alphabetical changes into the two volumes in question, or of entering vast numbers of persons out of the Directory as transacting business with Mr. Lightwood. It was the more necessary for his spirits, because, being of a sensitive temperament, he was apt to consider it personally disgraceful to himself that his master had no clients.

"How long have you been in the law, now?" asked Mr. Boffin, with a pounce, in his usual inquisitive way.

"I've been in the law, now, sir, about three years."

"Must have been as good as born in it!" said Mr. Boffin with admiration. "Do you like it?"

"I don't mind it much," returned young Blight, heaving a sigh, as if its bitterness were past.

"What wages do you get?"

"Half what I could wish," replied young Blight.

"What's the whole that you could wish?"

"Fifteen shillings a week," said the boy.

"About how long might it take you now, at an average rate of going, to be a Judge?" asked Mr. Boffin, after surveying his small stature in silence.

The boy answered that he had not yet quite worked out that little calculation.

"I suppose there's nothing to prevent your going in for it?" said Mr. Boffin.

The boy virtually replied that, as he had the

honor to be a Briton who never never never, there was nothing to prevent his going in for it. Yet he seemed inclined to suspect that there might be something to prevent his coming out with it.

"Would a couple of pound help you up at all?" asked Mr. Boffin.

On this head young Blight had no doubt whatever, so Mr. Boffin made him a present of that sum of money, and thanked him for his attention to his (Mr. Boffin's) affairs; which, he added, were now, he believed, as good as settled.

Then Mr. Boffin, with his stick at his ear, like a Familiar Spirit explaining the office to him, sat staring at a little bookcase of Law Practice and Law Reports, and at a window, and at an empty blue bag, and at a stick of sealing-wax, and a pen, and a box of wafers, and an apple, and a writing-pad — all very dusty — and at a number of inky smears and blots, and at an imperfectly disguised gun-case, pretending to be something legal, and at an iron box labelled HARMON ESTATE, until Mr. Lightwood appeared.

Mr. Lightwood explained that he came from the proctor's, with whom he had been engaged in transacting Mr. Boffin's affairs.

"And they seem to have taken a deal out of you!" said Mr. Boffin with commiseration.

Mr. Lightwood, without explaining that his weariness was chronic, proceeded with his exposition that, all forms of law having been at length complied with, will of Harmon deceased having been proved, death of Harmon next inheriting having been proved, etc. and so forth, Court of Chancery having been moved, etc. and so forth, he, Mr. Light-

wood, had now the great gratification, honor, and happiness, again etc. and so forth, of congratulating Mr. Boffin on coming into possession, as residuary legatee, of upwards of one hundred thousand pounds, standing in the books of the Governor and Company of the Bank of England, again etc. and so forth.

"And what is particularly eligible in the property, Mr. Boffin, is, that it involves no trouble. There are no estates to manage, no rents to return so much per cent upon in bad times (which is an extremely dear way of getting your name into the newspapers), no voters to become parboiled in hot water with, no agents to take the cream off the milk before it comes to table. You could put the whole in a cash-box to-morrow morning, and take it with you to — say, to the Rocky Mountains. Inasmuch as every man," concluded Mr. Lightwood with an indolent smile, "appears to be under a fatal spell which obliges him, sooner or later, to mention the Rocky Mountains in a tone of extreme familiarity to some other man, I hope you'll excuse my pressing you into the service of that gigantic range of geographical bores."

Without following this last remark very closely, Mr. Boffin cast his perplexed gaze first at the ceiling, and then at the carpet.

"Well," he remarked, "I don't know what to say about it, I am sure. I was a'most as well as I was. It's a great lot to take care of."

"My dear Mr. Boffin, then *don't* take care of it!"

"Eh?" said that gentleman.

"Speaking now," returned Mortimer, "with the irresponsible imbecility of a private individual, and

not with the profundity of a professional adviser, I should say that if the circumstance of its being too much weighs upon your mind, you have the haven of consolation open to you that you can easily make it less. And if you should be apprehensive of the trouble of doing so, there is the further haven of consolation that any number of people will take the trouble off your hands."

"Well! I don't quite see it," retorted Mr. Boffin, still perplexed. "That's not satisfactory, you know, what you're a-saying."

"Is Anything satisfactory, Mr. Boffin?" asked Mortimer, raising his eyebrows.

"I used to find it so," answered Mr. Boffin with a wistful look. "While I was foreman at the Bower — afore it *was* the Bower — I considered the business very satisfactory. The old man was a awful Tartar (saying it, I'm sure, without disrespect to his memory) but the business was a pleasant one to look after, from before daylight to past dark. It's a'most a pity," said Mr. Boffin, rubbing his ear, "that he ever went and made so much money. It would have been better for him if he hadn't so given himself up to it. You may depend upon it," making the discovery all of a sudden, "that he found it a great lot to take care of!"

Mr. Lightwood coughed, not convinced.

"And speaking of satisfactory," pursued Mr. Boffin, "why, Lord save us! when we come to take it to pieces, bit by bit, where's the satisfactoriness of the money as yet? When the old man does right the poor boy after all, the poor boy gets no good of it. He gets made away with, at the moment when he's lifting (as one may say) the cup

and sarser to his lips. Mr. Lightwood, I will now name to you that, on behalf of the poor dear boy, me and Mrs. Boffin have stood out against the old man times out of number, till he has called us every name he could lay his tongue to. I have seen him, after Mrs. Boffin has given him her mind respecting the claims of the nat'ral affections, catch off Mrs. Boffin's bonnet (she wore, in general, a black straw, perched, as a matter of convenience, on the top of her head), and send it spinning across the yard. I have indeed. And once, when he did this in a manner that amounted to personal, I should have given him a rattler for himself, if Mrs. Boffin hadn't thrown herself betwixt us, and received flush on the temple. Which dropped her, Mr. Lightwood. Dropped her."

Mr. Lightwood murmured, "Equal honor — Mrs. Boffin's head and heart."

"You understand; I name this," pursued Mr. Boffin, "to show you, now the affairs are wound up, that me and Mrs. Boffin have ever stood, as we were in Christian honor bound, the children's friend. Me and Mrs. Boffin stood the poor girl's friend; me and Mrs. Boffin stood the poor boy's friend; me and Mrs. Boffin up and faced the old man when we momently expected to be turned out for our pains. As to Mrs. Boffin," said Mr. Boffin, lowering his voice, "she mightu't wish it mentioned, now she's Fashionable, but she went so far as to tell him, in my presence, he was a flinty-hearted rascal."

Mr. Lightwood murmured, "Vigorous Saxon spirit — Mrs. Boffin's ancestors — bowmen — Agincourt and Cressy."

"The last time me and Mrs. Boffin saw the poor

boy," said Mr. Boffin, warming (as fat usually does) with a tendency to melt, "he was a child of seven year old. For when he come back to make intercession for his sister, me and Mrs. Boffin were away, overlooking a country contract which was to be sifted before carted, and he was come and gone in a single hour. I say he was a child of seven year old. He was going away, all alone and forlorn, to that foreign school, and he come into our place, situate up the yard of the present Bower, to have a warm at our fire. There was his little scanty travelling clothes upon him. There was his little scanty box outside in the shivering wind, which I was going to carry for him down to the steamboat, as the old man wouldn't hear of allowing a sixpence coach money. Mrs. Boffin, then quite a young woman and a pictur of a full-blown rose, stands him by her, kneels down at the fire, warms her two open hands, and falls to rubbing his cheeks; but, seeing the tears come into the child's eyes, the tears come fast into her own, and she holds him round the neck, like as if she was protecting him, and cries to me, 'I'd give the wide wide world, I would, to run away with him!' I don't say but what it cut me, and but what it at the same time heightened my feelings of admiration for Mrs. Boffin. The poor child clings to her for a while, as she clings to him, and then, when the old man calls, he says, 'I must go! God bless you!' and for a moment rests his heart against her bosom, and looks up at both of us, as if it was in pain — in agony. Such a look! I went aboard with him (I gave him first what little treat I thought he'd like), and I left him when he had fallen asleep in his berth, and I came back to

Mrs. Boffin. But tell her what I would of how I had left him, it all went for nothing, for, according to her thoughts, he never changed that look that he had looked up at us two. But it did one piece of good. Mrs. Boffin and me had no child of our own, and had sometimes wished that how we had one. But not now. 'We might both of us die,' says Mrs. Boffin, 'and other eyes might see that lonely look in our child.' So of a night, when it was very cold, or when the wind roared, or the rain dripped heavy, she would wake sobbing, and call out in a fluster, 'Don't you see the poor child's face? Oh, shelter the poor child!'—till in course of years it gently wore out, as many things do."

"My dear Mr. Boffin, everything wears to rags," said Mortimer with a light laugh.

"I won't go so far as to say everything," returned Mr. Boffin, on whom his manner seemed to grate, "because there's some things that I never found among the dust. Well, sir. So Mrs. Boffin and me grow older and older in the old man's service, living and working pretty hard in it, till the old man is discovered dead in his bed. Then Mrs. Boffin and me seal up his box, always standing on the table at the side of his bed, and having frequently heard tell of the Temple as a spot where lawyers' dust is contracted for, I come down here in search of a lawyer to advise, and I see your young man up at this present elevation chopping at the flies on the window-sill with his penknife, and I give him a Hoy! not then having the pleasure of your acquaintance, and by that means come to gain the honor. Then you, and the gentleman in the uncomfortable neckcloth under the little archway in St. Paul's Churchyard"—

"Doctors' Commons," observed Lightwood.

"I understood it was another name," said Mr. Boffin, pausing, "but you know best. Then you and Doctor Scommons, you go to work, and you do the thing that's proper, and you and Doctor S. take steps for finding out the poor boy, and at last you do find out the poor boy, and me and Mrs. Boffin often exchange the observation, 'We shall see him again under happy circumstances.' But it was never to be; and the want of satisfactoriness is, that after all the money never gets to him."

"But it gets," remarked Lightwood with a languid inclination of the head, "into excellent hands."

"It gets into the hands of me and Mrs. Boffin only this very day and hour, and that's what I am working round to, having waited for this day and hour a purpose. Mr. Lightwood, here has been a wicked, cruel murder. By that murder me and Mrs. Boffin mysteriously profit. For the apprehension and conviction of the murderer, we offer a reward of one tithe of the property — a reward of Ten Thousand Pound."

"Mr. Boffin, it's too much."

"Mr. Lightwood, me and Mrs. Boffin have fixed the sum together, and we stand to it."

"But let me represent to you," returned Lightwood, "speaking now with professional profundity, and not with individual imbecility, that the offer of such an immense reward is a temptation to forced suspicion, forced construction of circumstances, strained accusation, a whole tool-box of edged tools."

"Well," said Mr. Boffin, a little staggered, "that's the sum we put o' one side for the purpose. Whether

it shall be openly declared in the new notices that must now be put about in our names" —

"In your name, Mr. Boffin; in your name."

"Very well; in my name, which is the same as Mrs. Boffin's, and means both of us, is to be considered in drawing 'em up. But this is the first instruction that I, as the owner of the property, give to my lawyer on coming into it."

"Your lawyer, Mr. Boffin," returned Lightwood, making a very short note of it with a very rusty pen, "has the gratification of taking the instruction. There is another?"

"There is just one other, and no more. Make me as compact a little will as can be reconciled with tightness, leaving the whole of the property to 'my beloved wife, Henerietty Boffin, sole executrix.' Make it as short as you can, using those words; but make it tight."

At some loss to fathom Mr. Boffin's notions of a tight will, Lightwood felt his way.

"I beg your pardon, but professional profundity must be exact. When you say tight" —

"I mean tight," Mr. Boffin explained.

"Exactly so. And nothing can be more laudable. But is the tightness to bind Mrs. Boffin to any and what conditions?"

"Bind Mrs. Boffin?" interposed her husband. "No! What are you thinking of? What I want is, to make it all hers so tight as that her hold of it can't be loosed."

"Hers freely, to do what she likes with? Hers absolutely?"

"Absolutely?" repeated Mr. Boffin with a short sturdy laugh. "Hah! I should think so! It

would be handsome in me to begin to bind Mrs. Boffin at this time of day!"

So that instruction, too, was taken by Mr. Lightwood; and Mr. Lightwood, having taken it, was in the act of showing Mr. Boffin out, when Mr. Eugene Wrayburn almost jostled him in the doorway. Consequently Mr. Lightwood said, in his cool manner, "Let me make you two known to one another," and further signified that Mr. Wrayburn was counsel learned in the law, and that, partly in the way of business and partly in the way of pleasure, he had imparted to Mr. Wrayburn some of the interesting facts of Mr. Boffin's biography.

"Delighted," said Eugene — though he didn't look so — "to know Mr. Boffin."

"Thankee, sir, thankee," returned that gentleman. "And how do *you* like the law?"

"A — not particularly," returned Eugene.

"Too dry for you, eh? Well, I suppose it wants some years of sticking to, before you master it. But there's nothing like work. Look at the bees."

"I beg your pardon," returned Eugene with a reluctant smile, "but you will excuse my mentioning that I always protest against being referred to the bees."

"Do you?" said Boffin.

"I object on principle," said Eugene, "as a biped" —

"As a what?" asked Mr. Boffin.

"As a two-footed creature; — I object on principle, as a two-footed creature, to being constantly referred to insects and four-footed creatures. I object to being required to model my proceedings according to the proceedings of the bee, or the dog,

or the spider, or the camel. I fully admit that the camel, for instance, is an excessively temperate person; but he has several stomachs to entertain himself with, and I have only one. Besides, I am not fitted up with a convenient cool cellar to keep my drink in."

"But I said, you know," urged Boffin, rather at a loss for an answer, "the bee."

"Exactly. And may I represent to you that it's injudicious to say the bee? for the whole case is assumed. Conceding for a moment that there is any analogy between a bee, and a man in a shirt and pantaloons (which I deny), and that it is settled that the man is to learn from the bee (which I also deny), the question still remains, What is he to learn? To imitate? Or to avoid? When your friends the bees worry themselves to that highly fluttered extent about their sovereign, and become perfectly distracted touching the slightest monarchical movement, are we men to learn the greatness of Tuft-hunting, or the littleness of the Court Circular? I am not clear, Mr. Boffin, but that the hive may be satirical."

"At all events they work," said Mr. Boffin.

"Ye-es," returned Eugene disparagingly, "they work; but don't you think they overdo it? They work so much more than they need — they make so much more than they can eat — they are so incessantly boring and buzzing at their one idea till Death comes upon them — that don't you think they overdo it? And are human laborers to have no holidays, because of the bees? And am I never to have change of air, because the bees don't? Mr. Boffin, I think honey excellent at breakfast; but,

regarded in the light of my conventional schoolmaster and moralist, I protest against the tyrannical humbug of your friend the bee. With the highest respect for you."

"Thankee," said Mr. Boffin. "Morning, morning!"

But, the worthy Mr. Boffin jogged away with a comfortless impression he could have dispensed with, that there was a deal of unsatisfactoriness in the world, besides what he had recalled as appertaining to the Harmon property. And he was still jogging along Fleet Street in this condition of mind, when he became aware that he was closely tracked and observed by a man of genteel appearance.

"Now then!" said Mr. Boffin, stopping short, with his meditations brought to an abrupt check, "what's the next article?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Boffin."

"My name too, eh? How did you come by it? I don't know you."

"No, sir, you don't know me."

Mr. Boffin looked full at the man, and the man looked full at him. "No," said Mr. Boffin after a glance at the pavement, as if it were made of faces, and he were trying to match the man's, "I *don't* know you."

"I am nobody," said the stranger, "and not likely to be known; but Mr. Boffin's wealth" —

"Oh! that's got about already, has it?" muttered Mr. Boffin.

"— And his romantic manner of acquiring it, make him conspicuous. You were pointed out to me the other day."

"Well," said Mr. Boffin, "I should say I was a

disappintment to you when I *was* pinted out, if your politeness would allow you to confess it, for I am well aware I am not much to look at. What might you want with me? Not in the law, are you?"

"No, sir."

"No information to give for a reward?"

"No, sir."

There may have been a momentary mantling in the face of the man as he made the last answer, but it passed directly.

"If I don't mistake, you have followed me from my lawyer's, and tried to fix my attention. Say out! Have you? Or haven't you?" demanded Mr. Boffin, rather angry.

"Yes."

"Why have you?"

"If you will allow me to walk beside you, Mr. Boffin, I will tell you. Would you object to turn aside into this place — I think it is called Clifford's Inn — where we can hear one another better than in the roaring street?"

("Now," thought Mr. Boffin, "if he proposes a game at skittles, or meets a country gentleman just come into property, or produces any article of jewelry he has found, I'll knock him down!" With this discreet reflection, and carrying his stick in his arm as Punch carries his, Mr. Boffin turned into Clifford's Inn aforesaid.)

"Mr. Boffin, I happened to be in Chancery Lane this morning when I saw you going along before me. I took the liberty of following you, trying to make up my mind to speak to you, till you went into your lawyer's. Then I waited outside till you came out."

("Don't quite sound like skittles, nor yet country gentleman, nor yet jewelry," thought Mr. Boffin, "but there's no knowing.")

"I am afraid my object is a bold one, I am afraid it has little of the usual practical world about it, but I venture it. If you ask me, or if you ask yourself — which is more likely — what emboldens me, I answer, I have been strongly assured that you are a man of rectitude and plain dealing, with the soundest of sound hearts, and that you are blessed in a wife distinguished by the same qualities."

"Your information is true of Mrs. Boffin, anyhow," was Mr. Boffin's answer as he surveyed his new friend again. There was something repressed in the strange man's manner, and he walked with his eyes on the ground — though conscious, for all that, of Mr. Boffin's observation — and he spoke in a subdued voice. But his words came easily, and his voice was agreeable in tone, albeit constrained.

"When I add, I can discern for myself what the general tongue says of you — that you are quite unspoiled by Fortune, and not uplifted — I trust you will not, as a man of an open nature, suspect that I mean to flatter you, but will believe that all I mean is to excuse myself, these being my only excuses for my present intrusion."

("How much?" thought Mr. Boffin. "It must be coming to money. How much?")

"You will probably change your manner of living, Mr. Boffin, in your changed circumstances. You will probably keep a larger house, have many matters to arrange, and be beset by numbers of correspondents. If you would try me as your Secretary" —

"As *what?*" cried Mr. Boffin, with his eyes wide open.

"Your Secretary."

"Well," said Mr. Boffin under his breath, "that's a queer thing!"

"Or," pursued the stranger, wondering at Mr. Boffin's wonder, "if you would try me as your man of business under any name, I know you would find me faithful and grateful, and I hope you would find me useful. You may naturally think that my immediate object is money. Not so, for I would willingly serve you a year — two years — any term you might appoint — before that should begin to be a consideration between us."

"Where do you come from?" asked Mr. Boffin.

"I come," returned the other, meeting his eye, "from many countries."

Mr. Boffin's acquaintance with the names and situations of foreign lands being limited in extent and somewhat confused in quality, he shaped his next question on an elastic model.

"From — any particular place?"

"I have been in many places."

"What have you been?" asked Mr. Boffin.

Here again he made no great advance, for the reply was, "I have been a student and a traveller."

"But if it ain't a liberty to plump it out," said Mr. Boffin, "what do you do for your living?"

"I have mentioned," returned the other, with another look at him, and a smile, "what I aspire to do. I have been superseded as to some slight intentions I had, and I may say that I have now to begin life."

Not very well knowing how to get rid of this

applicant, and feeling the more embarrassed because his manner and appearance claimed a delicacy in which the worthy Mr. Boffin feared he himself might be deficient, that gentleman glanced into the mouldy little plantation, or cat preserve, of Clifford's Inn, as it was that day, in search of a suggestion. Sparrows were there, cats were there, dry-rot and wet-rot were there, but it was not otherwise a suggestive spot.

"All this time," said the stranger, producing a little pocket-book and taking out a card, "I have not mentioned my name. My name is Rokesmith. I lodge at one Mr. Wilfer's, at Holloway."

Mr. Boffin stared again.

"Father of Miss Bella Wilfer?" said he.

"My landlord has a daughter named Bella. Yes; no doubt."

Now, this name had been more or less in Mr. Boffin's thoughts all the morning, and for days before; therefore he said, —

"That's singular too!" unconsciously staring again, past all bounds of good manners, with the card in his hand. "Though, by the by, I suppose it was one of that family that pinted me out?"

"No. I have never been in the streets with one of them."

"Heard me talked of among 'em, though?"

"No. I occupy my own rooms, and have held scarcely any communication with them."

"Odder and odder!" said Mr. Boffin. "Well, sir, to tell you the truth, I don't know what to say to you."

"Say nothing," returned Mr. Rokesmith: "allow me to call on you in a few days. I am not so

unconscionable as to think it likely that you would accept me on trust at first sight, and take me out of the very street. Let me come to you for your further opinion at your leisure."

"That's fair, and I don't object," said Mr. Boffin; "but it must be on condition that it's fully understood that I no more know that I shall ever be in want of any gentleman as Secretary — it *was* Secretary you said; wasn't it?"

"Yes."

Again Mr. Boffin's eyes opened wide, and he stared at the applicant from head to foot, repeating, "Queer! — You're sure it was Secretary? Are you?"

"I am sure I said so."

"— As Secretary," repeated Mr. Boffin, meditating upon the word; "I no more know that I may ever want a Secretary, or what not, than I do that I shall ever be in want of the man in the moon. Me and Mrs. Boffin have not even settled that we shall make any change in our way of life. Mrs. Boffin's inclinations certainly do tend towards Fashion; but, being already set up in a fashionable way at the Bower, she may not make further alterations. However, sir, as you don't press yourself, I wish to meet you so far as saying, by all means call at the Bower if you like. Call in the course of a week or two. At the same time, I consider that I ought to name, in addition to what I have already named, that I have in my employment a literary man — *with* a wooden leg — as I have no thoughts of parting from."

"I regret to hear I am in some sort anticipated," Mr. Rokesmith answered, evidently having heard

it with surprise; "but perhaps other duties might arise?"

"You see," returned Mr. Boffin with a confidential sense of dignity, "as to my literary man's duties, they're clear. Professionally he declines and he falls, and as a friend he drops into poetry." Without observing that these duties seemed by no means clear to Mr. Rokesmith's astonished comprehension, Mr. Boffin went on, —

"And now, sir, I'll wish you good-day. You can call at the Bower any time in a week or two. It's not above a mile or so from you, and your landlord can direct you to it. But, as he may not know it by its new name of Boffin's Bower, say, when you inquire of him, it's Harmon's; will you?"

"Harmoon's," repeated Mr. Rokesmith, seeming to have caught the sound imperfectly, "Harmarn's. How do you spell it?"

"Why, as to the spelling of it," returned Mr. Boffin with great presence of mind, "that's *your* lookout. Harmon's is all you've got to say to *him*. Morning, morning, morning!" And so departed, without looking back.

CHAPTER IX.

MR. AND MRS. BOFFIN IN CONSULTATION.

BETAKING himself straight homeward, Mr. Boffin, without further let or hindrance, arrived at the Bower, and gave Mrs. Boffin (in a walking dress of black velvet and feathers, like a mourning-coach horse) an account of all he had said and done since breakfast.

"This brings us round, my dear," he then pursued, "to the question we left unfinished: namely, whether there's to be any new go-in for Fashion."

"Now, I'll tell you what I want, Noddy," said Mrs. Boffin, smoothing her dress with an air of immense enjoyment; "I want Society."

"Fashionable Society, my dear?"

"Yes!" cried Mrs. Boffin, laughing with the glee of a child. "Yes! It's no good my being kept here like Wax-Work; is it, now?"

"People have to pay to see Wax-Work, my dear," returned her husband, "whereas (though you'd be cheap at the same money), the neighbors is welcome to see *you* for nothing."

"But it don't answer," said the cheerful Mrs. Boffin. "When we worked like the neighbors, we suited one another. Now we have left work off, we have left off suiting one another."

"What! do you think of beginning work again?" Mr. Boffin hinted.

"Out of the question! We have come into a great fortune, and we must do what's right by our fortune; we must act up to it."

Mr. Boffin, who had a deep respect for his wife's intuitive wisdom, replied, though rather pensively: "I suppose we must."

"It's never been acted up to yet, and, consequently, no good has come of it," said Mrs. Boffin.

"True, to the present time," Mr. Boffin assented, with his former pensiveness, as he took his seat upon his settle. "I hope good may be coming of it in the future time. Towards which, what's your views, old lady?"

Mrs. Boffin, a smiling creature, broad of figure and simple of nature, with her hands folded in her lap, and with buxom creases in her throat, proceeded to expound her views.

"*I* say, a good house in a good neighborhood, good things about us, good living, and good society. *I* say, live like our means, without extravagance, and be happy."

"Yes. *I* say be happy, too," assented the still pensive Mr. Boffin.

"Lor-a-mussy!" exclaimed Mrs. Boffin, laughing and clapping her hands, and gayly rocking herself to and fro, "when I think of me in a light yellow chariot and pair, with silver boxes to the wheels"—

"Oh! you was thinking of that, was you, my dear?"

"Yes!" cried the delighted creature. "And with a footman up behind, with a bar across, to

keep his legs from being poled! And with a coachman up in front, sinking down into a seat big enough for three of him, all covered with upholstery in green and white! And with two bay horses tossing their heads, and stepping higher than they trot long-ways! And with you and me leaning back inside, as grand as ninepence! Oh-h-h-h My! Ha ha ha ha ha!"

Mrs. Boffin clapped her hands again, rocked herself again, beat her feet upon the floor, and wiped the tears of laughter from her eyes.

"And what, my old lady," inquired Mr. Boffin, when he also had sympathetically laughed: "what's your views on the subject of the Bower?"

"Shut it up. Don't part with it, but put somebody in it to keep it."

"Any other views?"

"Noddy!" said Mrs. Boffin, coming from her fashionable sofa to his side on the plain settle, and hooking her comfortable arm through his. "Next I think — and I really have been thinking early and late — of the disappointed girl; her that was so cruelly disappointed, you know, both of her husband and his riches. Don't you think we might do something for her? Have her to live with us? Or something of that sort?"

"Ne-ver once thought of the way of doing it!" cried Mr. Boffin, smiting the table in his admiration. "What a thinking steam-ingein this old lady is! And she don't know how she does it. Neither does the ingein!"

Mrs. Boffin pulled his nearest ear, in acknowledgment of this piece of philosophy, and then said, gradually toning down to a motherly strain:

"Last, and not least, I have taken a fancy. Y
remember dear little John Harmon, before he we
to school? Over yonder across the yard, at c
fire? Now that he is past all benefit of the mon
and it's come to us, I should like to find so
orphan child, and take the boy and adopt him, a
give him John's name, and provide for him. So
how it would make me easier, I fancy. Say i
only a whim" —

"But I don't say so," interposed her husband.

"No, but, deary, if you did" —

"I should be a Beast if I did," her husba
interposed again.

"That's as much as to say you agree? G
and kind of you, and like you, deary! And do
you begin to find it pleasant now," said Mrs. Bof
once more radiant in her comely way from head
foot, and once more smoothing her dress w
immense enjoyment, "don't you begin to find
pleasant already, to think that a child will be m
brighter, and better, and happier, because of t
poor sad child that day? And isn't it pleasant
know that the good will be done with the poor
child's own money?"

"Yes; and it's pleasant to know that you
Mrs. Boffin," said her husband, "and it's bee
pleasant thing to know this many and many
year!" It was ruin to Mrs. Boffin's aspiratic
but, having so spoken, they sat side by side, a ho
lessly Unfashionable pair.

These two ignorant and unpolished people l
guided themselves, so far on in their journey of l
by a religious sense of duty and desire to do rig
Ten thousand weaknesses and absurdities mi

have been detected in the breasts of both; ten thousand vanities additional, possibly, in the breast of the woman. But the hard, wrathful, and sordid nature that had wrung as much work out of them as could be got in their best days, for as little money as could be paid to hurry on their worst, had never been so warped but that it knew their moral straightness, and respected it. In its own despite, in a constant conflict with itself and them, it had done so. And this is the eternal law. For, Evil often stops short at itself, and dies with the doer of it; but Good never.

Through his most inveterate purposes, the dead Jailer of Harmony Jail had known these two faithful servants to be honest and true. While he raged at them and reviled them for opposing him with the speech of the honest and true, it had scratched his stony heart, and he had perceived the powerlessness of all his wealth to buy them if he had addressed himself to the attempt. So, even while he was their griping task-master, and never gave them a good word, he had written their names down in his will. So, even while it was his daily declaration that he mistrusted all mankind — and sorely indeed he did mistrust all who bore any resemblance to himself — he was as certain that these two people, surviving him, would be trustworthy in all things, from the greatest to the least, as he was that he must surely die.

Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, sitting side by side, with Fashion withdrawn to an immeasurable distance, fell to discussing how they could best find their orphan. Mrs. Boffin suggested advertisement in the newspapers, requesting orphans answering an-

nexed description to apply at the Bower on a c
tain day; but Mr. Boffin wisely apprehendi
obstruction of the neighboring thoroughfares
orphan swarms, this course was negatived. M
Boffin next suggested application to their cler
man for a likely orphan. Mr. Boffin thinking bet
of this scheme, they resolved to call upon t
reverend gentleman at once, and to take the sa
opportunity of making acquaintance with M
Bella Wilfer. In order that these visits might
visits of state, Mrs. Boffin's equipage was orde
out.

This consisted of a long, hammer-headed
horse, formerly used in the business, attached t
four-wheeled chaise of the same period, which l
long been exclusively used by the Harmony J
poultry as the favorite laying-place of several
creet hens. An unwonted application of corn
the horse, and of paint and varnish to the carria
when both fell in as a part of the Boffin legacy, l
made what Mr. Boffin considered a neat turnout
the whole; and a driver being added, in the per
of a long hammer-headed young man who wa
very good match for the horse, left nothing to
desired. He, too, had been formerly used in
business, but was now entombed, by an hon
jobbing tailor of the district, in a perfect Sepulc
of coat and gaiters, sealed with ponderous buttoi

Behind this domestic Mr. and Mrs. Boffin t
their seats in the back compartment of the vehic
which was sufficiently commodious, but had
undignified and alarming tendency, in getting o
a rough crossing, to hiccup itself away from
front compartment. On their being descried eme

ing from the gates of the Bower, the neighborhood turned out at door and window to salute the Boffins. Among those who were ever and again left behind, staring after the equipage, were many youthful spirits, who hailed it in stentorian tones with such congratulations as "Nod-dy Boffin!" "Boffin's mo-ney!" "Down with the dust, Boffin!" and other similar compliments. These, the hammer-headed young man took in such ill part that he often impaired the majesty of the progress by pulling up short, and making as though he would alight to exterminate the offenders; a purpose from which he only allowed himself to be dissuaded after long and lively arguments with his employers.

At length the Bower district was left behind, and the peaceful dwelling of the Reverend Frank Milvey was gained. The Reverend Frank Milvey's abode was a very modest abode, because his income was a very modest income. He was officially accessible to every blundering old woman who had incoherence to bestow upon him, and readily received the Boffins. He was quite a young man, expensively educated and wretchedly paid, with quite a young wife and half a dozen quite young children. He was under the necessity of teaching and translating from the classics, to eke out his scanty means, yet was generally expected to have more time to spare than the idlest person in the parish, and more money than the richest. He accepted the needless inequalities and inconsistencies of his life with a kind of conventional submission that was almost slavish; and any daring layman, who would have adjusted such burdens as his more decently and graciously, would have had small help from him.

With a ready, patient face and manner, and with a latent smile that showed a quick enc observation of Mrs. Boffin's dress, Mr. Milvey his little book-room — charged with sounds cries as though the six children above were co down through the ceiling, and the roasting le mutton below were coming up through the flo listened to Mrs. Boffin's statement of her wa an orphan.

"I think," said Mr. Milvey, "that you have n had a child of your own, Mr. and Mrs. Boffin?

Never.

"But, like the Kings and Queens in the F Tales, I suppose you have wished for one?"

In a general way, yes.

Mr. Milvey smiled again as he remarked to self, "Those kings and queens were always wis for children." It occurred to him, perhaps, th they had been Curates, their wishes might tended in the opposite direction.

"I think," he pursued, "we had better take Milvey into our Council. She is indispensabl me. If you please, I'll call her."

So Mr. Milvey called, "Margaretta, my de and Mrs. Milvey came down. A pretty, b little woman, something worn by anxiety, who repressed many pretty tastes and bright fan and substituted, in their stead, schools, soup, fla coals, and all the week-day cares and Sunday co of a large population, young and old. As galla had Mr. Milvey repressed much in himself naturally belonged to his old studies and old fe students, and taken up among the poor and t children with the hard crumbs of life.

"Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, my dear, whose good fortune you have heard of."

Mrs. Milvey, with the most unaffected grace in the world, congratulated them, and was glad to see them. Yet her engaging face, being an open as well as a perceptive one, was not without her husband's latent smile.

"Mrs. Boffin wishes to adopt a little boy, my dear."

Mrs. Milvey looking rather alarmed, her husband added, —

"An orphan, my dear."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Milvey, re-assured for her own little boys.

"And I was thinking, Margaretta, that perhaps old Mrs. Goody's grandchild might answer the purpose."

"Oh, my *dear* Frank! I *don't* think that would do."

"No?"

"Oh, *no!*"

The smiling Mrs. Boffin, feeling it incumbent on her to take part in the conversation, and being charmed with the emphatic little wife and her ready interest, here offered her acknowledgments, and inquired what there was against him.

"I *don't* think," said Mrs. Milvey, glancing at the Reverend Frank — "and I believe my husband will agree with me when he considers it again — that you could possibly keep the orphan clean from snuff. Because his grandmother takes so *many* ounces and drops it over him."

"But he would not be living with his grandmother then, Margaretta," said Mr. Milvey.

"No, Frank, but it would be impossible to l
her from Mrs. Boffin's house; and the *more* t
was to eat and drink there, the oftener she w
go. And she *is* an inconvenient woman. I
it's not uncharitable to remember that last Ch
mas Eve she drank eleven cups of tea, and grum
all the time. And she is *not* a grateful wo
Frank. You recollect her addressing a crowd
side this house about her wrongs, when, one n
after we had gone to bed, she brought back
petticoat of new flannel that had been given
because it was too short."

"That's true," said Mr. Milvey. "I don't t
that would do. Would little Harrison" —

"Oh, *Frank!*" remonstrated his emphatic wi

"He has no grandmother, my dear."

"No, but I *don't* think Mrs. Boffin would lik
orphan who squints so *much*."

"That's true again," said Mr. Milvey, becor
haggard with perplexity. "If a little girl w
do" —

"But, my *dear* Frank, Mrs. Boffin wants a bo

"That's true again," said Mr. Milvey. "
Bocker is a nice boy" (thoughtfully).

"But I *doubt*, Frank," Mrs. Milvey hinted aft
little hesitation, "if Mrs. Boffin wants an or
quite nineteen, who drives a cart and waters
roads."

Mr. Milvey referred the point to Mrs. Boffin
look; on that smiling lady's shaking her b
velvet bonnet and bows, he remarked, in l
spirits, "That's true again."

"I am sure," said Mrs. Boffin, concerned at gi
so much trouble, "that if I had known you w

have taken so much pains, sir — and you too, ma'am — I don't think I would have come."

"*Pray* don't say that!" urged Mrs. Milvey.

"No, don't say that," assented Mr. Milvey, "because we are so much obliged to you for giving us the preference." Which Mrs. Milvey confirmed; and really the kind, conscientious couple spoke as if they kept some profitable orphan warehouse, and were personally patronized. "But it is a responsible trust," added Mr. Milvey, "and difficult to discharge. At the same time, we are naturally very unwilling to lose the chance you so kindly give us, and if you could afford us a day or two to look about us, — you know, Margaretta, we might carefully examine the workhouse, and the Infant School, and your District."

"To be *sure!*" said the emphatic little wife.

"We have orphans, I know," pursued Mr. Milvey, quite with the air as if he might have added "in stock," and quite as anxiously as if there were great competition in the business, and he were afraid of losing an order, "over at the clay-pits; but they are employed by relations or friends, and I am afraid it would come at last to a transaction in the way of barter. And even if you exchanged blankets for the child — or books and firing — it would be impossible to prevent their being turned into liquor."

Accordingly, it was resolved that Mr. and Mrs. Milvey should search for an orphan likely to suit, and as free as possible from the foregoing objections, and should communicate again with Mrs. Boffin. Then, Mr. Boffin took the liberty of mentioning to Mr. Milvey that if Mr. Milvey would do

him the kindness to be perpetually his banke
the extent of "a twenty-pound note or so," t
expended without any reference to him, he w
be heartily obliged. At this both Mr. Milvey
Mrs. Milvey were quite as much pleased as if
had no wants of their own, but only knew
poverty was in the persons of other people; an
the interview terminated with satisfaction and
opinion on all sides.

"Now, old lady," said Mr. Boffin as they resu
their seats behind the hammer-headed horse
man, "having made a very agreeable visit t
we'll try Wilfer's."

It appeared, on their drawing up at the fa
gate, that to try Wilfer's was a thing more e
projected than done, on account of the ext
difficulty of getting into that establishment; t
pulls at the bell producing no external result, th
each was attended by audible sounds of scampe
and rushing within. At the fourth tug — vi
tively administered by the hammer-headed y
man — Miss Lavinia appeared, emerging from
house in an accidental manner, with a bonnet
parasol, as designing to take a contemplative
The young lady was astonished to find visito
the gate, and expressed her feelings in appropr
action.

"Here's Mr. and Mrs. Boffin!" growled
hammer-headed young man through the bar
the gate, and at the same time shaking it as i
were on view in a Menagerie; "they've been
half an hour."

"Who did you say?" asked Miss Lavinia.

"Mr. and Mrs. Boffin!" returned the y
man, rising into a roar.

Miss Lavinia tripped up the steps to the house-door, tripped down the steps with the key, tripped across the little garden, and opened the gate. "Please to walk in," said Miss Lavinia haughtily. "Our servant is out."

Mr. and Mrs. Boffin complying, and pausing in the little hall until Miss Lavinia came up to show them where to go next, perceived three pairs of listening legs upon the stairs above. Mrs. Wilfer's legs, Miss Bella's legs, Mr. George Sampson's legs.

"Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, I think?" said Lavinia in a warning voice.

Strained attention on the part of Mrs. Wilfer's legs, of Miss Bella's legs, of Mr. George Sampson's legs.

"Yes, miss."

"If you'll step this way — down these stairs — I'll let ma know."

Excited flight of Mrs. Wilfer's legs, of Miss Bella's legs, of Mr. George Sampson's legs.

After waiting some quarter of an hour alone in the family sitting-room, which presented traces of having been so hastily arranged after a meal, that one might have doubted whether it was made tidy for visitors, or cleared for blind-man's buff, Mr. and Mrs. Boffin became aware of the entrance of Mrs. Wilfer, majestically faint, and with a condescending stitch in her side: which was her company manner.

"Pardon me," said Mrs. Wilfer, after the first salutations, and as soon as she had adjusted the handkerchief under her chin, and waved her gloved hands, "to what am I indebted for this honor?"

"To make short of it, ma'am," returned Mr.

Boffin, "perhaps you may be acquainted with
names of me and Mrs. Boffin, as having come
a certain property?"

"I have heard, sir," returned Mrs. Wilfer wi
dignified bend of her head, "of such being
case."

"And I dare say, ma'am," pursued Mr. Bo
while Mrs. Boffin added confirmatory nods
smiles, "you are not very much inclined to
kindly to us?"

"Pardon me," said Mrs. Wilfer. "'Twere un
to visit upon Mr. and Mrs. Boffin a calamity w
was doubtless a dispensation." These words
rendered the more effective by a serenely h
expression of suffering.

"That's fairly meant, I am sure," remarked
honest Mr. Boffin. "Mrs. Boffin and me, ma
are plain people, and we don't want to preten
anything, nor yet to go round and round at
thing; because there's always a straight wa
everything. Consequently, we make this cal
say that we shall be glad to have the honor
pleasure of your daughter's acquaintance, and
we shall be rejiced if your daughter will com
consider our house in the light of her home equ
with this. In short, we want to cheer your da
ter, and to give her the opportunity of sharing
pleasures as we are a-going to take ourselves.
want to brisk her up, and brisk her about, and
her a change."

"That's it!" said the open-hearted Mrs. B
"Lor! Let's be comfortable."

Mrs. Wilfer bent her head in a distant mann
her lady visitor, and with majestic monotony
plied to the gentleman, —

"Pardon me. I have several daughters. Which of my daughters am I to understand is thus favored by the kind intentions of Mr. Boffin and his lady?"

"Don't you see?" the ever-smiling Mrs. Boffin put in. "Naturally, Miss Bella, you know."

"Oh-h!" said Mrs. Wilfer with a severely unconvinced look. "My daughter Bella is accessible, and shall speak for herself." Then, opening the door a little way, simultaneously with a sound of scuttling outside it, the good lady made the proclamation, "Send Miss Bella to me!" Which proclamation, though grandly formal, and one might almost say heraldic, to hear, was, in fact, enunciated with her maternal eyes reproachfully glaring on that young lady in the flesh — and in so much of it, that she was retiring with difficulty into the small closet under the stairs, apprehensive of the emergence of Mr. and Mrs. Boffin.

"The avocations of R. W., my husband," Mrs. Wilfer explained, on resuming her seat, "keep him fully engaged in the City at this time of the day, or he would have had the honor of participating in your reception beneath our humble roof."

"Very pleasant premises!" said Mr. Boffin cheerfully.

"Pardon me, sir," returned Mrs. Wilfer, correcting him, "it is the abode of conscious though independent Poverty."

Finding it rather difficult to pursue the conversation down this road, Mr. and Mrs. Boffin sat staring at midair, and Mrs. Wilfer sat silently giving them to understand that every breath she drew required to be drawn with a self-denial rarely paralleled in

history, until Miss Bella appeared: whom M
Wilfer presented, and to whom she explained t
purpose of the visitors.

"I am much obliged to you, I am sure," s
Miss Bella, coldly shaking her curls, "but I do
if I have the inclination to go out at all."

"Bella!" Mrs. Wilfer admonished her: "Be
you must conquer this."

"Yes, do what your ma says, and conquer it,
dear," urged Mrs. Boffin, "because we shall be
glad to have you, and because you are much
pretty to keep yourself shut up." With that,
pleasant creature gave her a kiss, and patted her
her dimpled shoulders; Mrs. Wilfer sitting sti
by, like a functionary presiding over an intervi
previous to an execution.

"We are going to move into a nice house," s
Mrs. Boffin, who was woman enough to comprom
Mr. Boffin on that point, when he couldn't v
well contest it; "and we are going to set up a n
carriage, and we'll go everywhere and see eve
thing. And you mustn't," seating Bella bes
her, and patting her hand, "you mustn't fee
dislike to us to begin with, because we could
help it, you know, my dear."

With the natural tendency of youth to yi
to candor and sweet temper, Miss Bella was
touched by the simplicity of this address, that
frankly returned Mrs. Boffin's kiss. Not at all
the satisfaction of that good woman of the wo
her mother, who sought to hold the advantage
ground of obliging the Boffins instead of be
obliged.

"My youngest daughter, Lavinia," said M

Wilfer, glad to make a diversion, as that young lady reappeared. "Mr. George Sampson, a friend of the family."

The friend of the family was in that stage of the tender passion which bound him to regard everybody else as the foe of the family. He put the round head of his cane in his mouth, like a stopper, when he sat down; as if he felt himself full to the throat with affronting sentiments. And he eyed the Boffins with implacable eyes.

"If you like to bring your sister with you when you come to stay with us," said Mrs. Boffin, "of course we shall be glad. The better you please yourself, Miss Bella, the better you'll please us."

"Oh, my consent is of no consequence at all, I suppose?" cried Miss Lavinia.

"Lavvy," said her sister in a low voice, "have the goodness to be seen and not heard."

"No, I won't," replied the sharp Lavinia. "I'm not a child, to be taken notice of by strangers."

"You *are* a child."

"I'm not a child, and I won't be taken notice of. 'Bring your sister,' indeed!"

"Lavinia!" said Mrs. Wilfer. "Hold! I will not allow you to utter in my presence the absurd suspicion that any strangers — I care not what their names — can patronize my child. Do you dare to suppose, you ridiculous girl, that Mr. and Mrs. Boffin would enter these doors upon a patronizing errand; or, if they did, would remain within them only for one single instant, while your mother had the strength yet remaining in her vital frame to request them to depart? You little know your mother if you presume to think so."

"It's all very fine," Lavinia began to grum
when Mrs. Wilfer repeated, —

"Hold! I will not allow this. Do you not kı
what is due to guests? Do you not compreh
that in presuming to hint that this lady and gen
man could have any idea of patronizing any m
ber of your family — I care not which — you acc
them of an impertinence little less than insane?

"Never mind me and Mrs. Boffin, ma'am," s
Mr. Boffin smilingly: "we don't care."

"Pardon me, but *I* do," returned Mrs. Wilfer.

Miss Lavinia laughed a short laugh as she n
tered, "Yes, to be sure."

"And I require my audacious child," procee
Mrs. Wilfer, with a withering look at her young
on whom it had not the slightest effect, "to pl
to be just to her sister Bella; to remember that
sister Bella is much sought after; and that, w
her sister Bella accepts an attention, she consi
herself to be conferring qui-i-ite as much honor
this with an indignant shiver — "as she receive

But here Miss Bella repudiated, and said quie
"I can speak for myself, you know, ma.
needn't bring *me* in, please."

"And it's all very well aiming at others thro
convenient me," said the irrepressible Lavinia sp
fully; "but I should like to ask George Samp
what *he* says to it."

"Mr. Sampson," proclaimed Mrs. Wilfer, see
that young gentleman take his stopper out, and
darkly fixing him with her eyes as that he put i
again: "Mr. Sampson, as a friend of this fan
and a frequenter of this house, is, I am persuac
far too well bred to interpose on such an invitati

This exaltation of the young gentleman moved the conscientious Mrs. Boffin to repentance for having done him an injustice in her mind, and consequently to saying that she and Mr. Boffin would any time be glad to see him; an attention which he handsomely acknowledged by replying, with his stopper unremoved, "Much obliged to you, but I am always engaged, day and night."

However, Bella compensating for all drawbacks by responding to the advances of the Boffins in an engaging way, that easy pair were on the whole well satisfied, and proposed to the said Bella that, as soon as they should be in a condition to receive her in a manner suitable to her desires, Mrs. Boffin should return with notice of the fact. This arrangement Mrs. Wilfer sanctioned with a stately inclination of her head and wave of her gloves, as who should say, "Your demerits shall be overlooked, and you shall be mercifully gratified, poor people."

"By the by, ma'am," said Mr. Boffin, turning back as he was going, "you have a lodger?"

"A gentleman," Mrs. Wilfer answered, qualifying the low expression, "undoubtedly occupies our first floor."

"I may call him Our Mutual Friend," said Mr. Boffin. "What sort of a fellow *is* Our Mutual Friend, now? Do you like him?"

"Mr. Rokesmith is very punctual, very quiet, a very eligible inmate."

"Because," Mr. Boffin explained, "you must know that I'm not particularly well acquainted with Our Mutual Friend, for I have only seen him once. You give a good account of him. Is he at home?"

"Mr. Rokesmith is at home," said Mrs. Wil
"indeed," pointing through the window, "t
he stands at the garden-gate. Waiting for
perhaps?"

"Perhaps so," replied Mr. Boffin. "Saw me c
in, maybe."

Bella had closely attended to this short dialo
Accompanying Mrs. Boffin to the gate, she as clo
watched what followed.

"How are you, sir, how are you?" said
Boffin. "This is Mrs. Boffin. Mr. Rokesmith,
I told you of, my dear."

She gave him good day, and he bestirred hin
and helped her to her seat, and the like, wi
ready hand.

"Good-by for the present, Miss Bella," said
Boffin, calling out a hearty parting. "We
meet again soon! And then I hope I shall have
little John Harmon to show you."

Mr. Rokesmith, who was at the wheel adjus
the skirts of her dress, suddenly looked behind
and around him, and then looked up at her, wi
face so pale that Mrs. Boffin cried, —

"Gracious!" And after a moment, "What's
matter, sir?"

"How can you show her the Dead?" retu
Mr. Rokesmith.

"It's only an adopted child. One I have told
of. One I'm going to give the name to!"

"You took me by surprise," said Mr. Rokesn
"and it sounded like an omen, that you sh
speak of showing the Dead to one so young
blooming."

Now, Bella suspected by this time that Mr. R

smith admired her. Whether the knowledge (for it was rather that than suspicion) caused her to incline to him a little more, or a little less, than she had done at first; whether it rendered her eager to find out more about him, because she sought to establish reason for her distrust, or because she sought to free him from it; was as yet dark to her own heart. But at most times he occupied a great amount of her attention, and she had set her attention closely on this incident.

That he knew it as well as she, she knew as well as he, when they were left together standing on the path by the garden-gate.

"Those are worthy people, Miss Wilfer."

"Do you know them well?" asked Bella.

He smiled, reproaching her, and she colored, reproaching herself — both, with the knowledge that she had meant to entrap him into an answer not true — when he said, "I know *of* them."

"Truly, he told us he had seen you but once."

"Truly, I supposed he did."

Bella was nervous now, and would have been glad to recall her question.

"You thought it strange that, feeling much interested in you, I should start at what sounded like a proposal to bring you into contact with the murdered man who lies in his grave. I might have known — of course, in a moment should have known — that it could not have that meaning. But my interest remains."

Re-entering the family-room in a meditative state, Miss Bella was received by the irrepressible Lavinia with, —

"There, Bella! At last I hope you have got your

wishes realized — by your Boffins. You'll be
enough now — with your Boffins. You can hav
much flirting as you like — at your Boffins'.
you won't take *me* to your Boffins', I can tell yo
you and your Boffins, too."

"If," quoth Mr. George Sampson, moodily pul
his stopper out, "Miss Bella's Mr. Boffin comes
more of his nonsense to *me*, I only wish hin
understand, as betwixt man and man, that he
it at his per——" and was going to say peril;
Miss Lavinia, having no confidence in his me
powers, and feeling his oration to have no defi
application to any circumstances, jerked his sto
in again, with a sharpness that made his
water.

And now the worthy Mrs. Wilfer, having
her youngest daughter as a lay-figure for the edi
tion of these Boffins, became bland to her, and
ceeded to develop her last instance of force of c
acter, which was still in reserve. This was
illuminate the family with her remarkable po
as a physiognomist; powers that terrified R.
whenever let loose, as being always fraught
gloom and evil which no inferior prescience
aware of. And this Mrs. Wilfer now did, b
observed, in jealousy of these Boffins, in the
same moments when she was already reflecting
she would flourish these very same Boffins, and
state they kept, over the heads of her Boffin
friends.

"Of their manners," said Mrs. Wilfer, "I
nothing. Of their appearance, I say nothing.
the disinterestedness of their attentions tow
Bella, I say nothing. But the craft, the secrecy,

dark, deep, underhand plotting, written in Mrs. Boffin's countenance, make me shudder."

As an incontrovertible proof that those baleful attributes were all there, Mrs. Wilfer shuddered on the spot.

CHAPTER X.

A MARRIAGE CONTRACT.

THERE is excitement in the Veneering mans
The mature young lady is going to be married (
der and all) to the mature young gentleman, and
is to be married from the Veneering house, and
Veneerings are to give the breakfast. The Ana
cal, who objects as a matter of principle to everyt
that occurs on the premises, necessarily object
the match; but his consent has been dispensed w
and a spring van is delivering its load of greenh
plants at the door, in order that to-morrow's f
may be crowned with flowers.

The mature young lady is a lady of prope
The mature young gentleman is a gentlema
property. He invests his property. He goes i
condescending, amateurish way into the City, atte
meetings of Directors, and has to do with traffi
Shares. As is well known to the wise in t
generation, traffic in Shares is the one thing to h
to do with in this world. Have no antecedents
established character, no cultivation, no ideas,
manners; have Shares. Have Shares enough t
on Boards of Direction in capital letters, oscil
on mysterious business between London and P

and be great. Where does he come from? Shares. Where is he going to? Shares. What are his tastes? Shares. Has he any principles? Shares. What squeezes him into Parliament? Shares. Perhaps he never of himself achieved success in anything, never originated anything, never produced anything? Sufficient answer to all: Shares. Oh, mighty Shares! To set those blaring images so high, and to cause us smaller vermin, as under the influence of henbane or opium, to cry out night and day, "Relieve us of our money, scatter it for us, buy us and sell us, ruin us, only, we beseech ye, take rank among the powers of the earth, and fatten on us!"

While the Loves and Graces have been preparing this torch for Hymen, which is to be kindled to-morrow, Mr. Twemlow has suffered much in his mind. It would seem that both the mature young lady and the mature young gentleman must indubitably be Veneering's oldest friends. Wards of his perhaps? Yet that can scarcely be, for they are older than himself. Veneering has been in their confidence throughout, and has done much to lure them to the altar. He has mentioned to Twemlow how he said to Mrs. Veneering, "Anastatia, this must be a match." He has mentioned to Twemlow how he regards Sophronia Akershem (the mature young lady) in the light of a sister, and Alfred Lammle (the mature young gentleman) in the light of a brother. Twemlow has asked him whether he went to school as a junior with Alfred? He has answered, "Not exactly." Whether Sophronia was adopted by his mother? He has answered, "Not precisely so." Twemlow's hand has gone to his forehead with a lost air.

But two or three weeks ago, Twemlow, sit
over his newspaper, and over his dry toast and w
tea, and over the stable-yard in Duke Street,
James's, received a highly-perfumed cocked-hat
monogram from Mrs. Veneering, entreating her d
est Mr. T., if not particularly engaged that da
come like a charming soul, and make a fourt
dinner with dear Mr. Podsnap, for the discus
of an interesting family topic; the last three w
doubly underlined, and pointed with a note of adm
tion. And Twemlow, replying, "Not engaged,
more than delighted," goes, and this takes place

"My dear Twemlow," says Veneering, "your re
response to Anastatia's unceremonious invitatio
truly kind, and like an old, old friend. You k
our dear friend Podsnap?"

Twemlow ought to know the dear friend Pods
who covered him with so much confusion, and
says he does know him, and Podsnap reciproca
Apparently, Podsnap has been so wrought upo
a short time, as to believe that he has been intim
in the house many, many, many years. In the fri
liest manner he is making himself quite at h
with his back to the fire, executing a statuette of
Colossus at Rhodes. Twemlow has before noti
in his feeble way how soon the Veneering gu
become infected with the Veneering fiction.
however, that he has the least notion of its be
his own case.

"Our friends, Alfred and Sophronia," purs
Veneering, the veiled prophet: "our friends Alf
and Sophronia, you will be glad to hear, my d
fellows, are going to be married. As my wife an
make it a family affair, the entire direction of wh

we take upon ourselves, of course our first step is to communicate the fact to our family friends."

("Oh!" thinks Twemlow, with his eyes on Podsnap, "then there are only two of us, and he's the other.")

"I did hope," Veneering goes on, "to have had Lady Tippins to meet you; but she is always in request, and is unfortunately engaged."

("Oh!" thinks Twemlow, with his eyes wandering, "then there are three of us, and *she*'s the other.")

"Mortimer Lightwood," resumes Veneering, "whom you both know, is out of town; but he writes, in his whimsical manner, that as we ask him to be bridegroom's best man when the ceremony takes place, he will not refuse, though he doesn't see what he has to do with it."

("Oh!" thinks Twemlow, with his eyes rolling, "then there are four of us, and *he*'s the other.")

"Boots and Brewer," observes Veneering, "whom you also know, I have not asked to-day; but I reserve them for the occasion."

("Then," thinks Twemlow, with his eyes shut, "there are si——" But here collapses, and does not completely recover until dinner is over, and the Analytical has been requested to withdraw.)

"We now come," says Veneering, "to the point, the real point, of our little family consultation. Sophronia, having lost both father and mother, has no one to give her away."

"Give her away yourself," says Podsnap.

"My dear Podsnap, no. For three reasons. Firstly, because I couldn't take so much upon myself when I have respected family friends to remember. Secondly, because I am not so vain as to think that I

look the part. Thirdly, because Anastatia is a li superstitious on the subject, and feels averse to giving away anybody until baby is old enough t married."

"What would happen if he did?" Podsnap quires of Mrs. Veneering.

"My dear Mr. Podsnap, it's very foolish I kn but I have an instinctive presentiment that if Ha ton gave away anybody else first, he would n give away baby." Thus Mrs. Veneering; with open hands pressed together, and each of her e aquiline fingers looking so very like her one aqui nose, that the brand-new jewels on them seem ne sary for distinction's sake.

"But, my dear Podsnap," quoth Veneering, "t *is* a tried friend of our family who, I think and h you will agree with me, Podsnap, is the friend whom this agreeable duty almost naturally devol That friend," saying the words as if the comp were about a hundred and fifty in number, "is among us. That friend is Twemlow."

"Certainly!" From Podsnap.

"That friend," Veneering repeats with gre firmness, "is our dear good Twemlow. And I not sufficiently express to you, my dear Podsn the pleasure I feel in having this opinion of m and Anastatia's so readily confirmed by you, t other equally familiar and tried friend who sta in the proud position — I mean, who proudly sta in the position — or I ought rather to say, places Anastatia and myself in the proud posit of himself standing in the simple position — baby's godfather." And, indeed, Veneering is m relieved in mind to find that Podsnap betrays jealousy of Twemlow's elevation.

So, it has come to pass that the spring van is strewing flowers on the rosy hours and on the staircase, and that Twemlow is surveying the ground on which he is to play his distinguished part to-morrow. He has already been to the church, and taken note of the various impediments in the aisle, under the auspices of an extremely dreary widow who opens the pews, and whose left hand appears to be in a state of acute rheumatism, but is, in fact, voluntarily doubled up to act as a money-box.

And now Veneering shoots out of the Study wherein he is accustomed, when contemplative, to give his mind to the carving and gilding of the Pilgrims going to Canterbury, in order to show Twemlow the little flourish he has prepared for the trumpets of fashion, describing how that on the seventeenth instant, at St. James's Church, the Reverend Blank Blank, assisted by the Reverend Dash Dash, united in the bonds of matrimony Alfred Lammle, Esquire, of Sackville Street, Piccadilly, to Sophronia, only daughter of the late Horatio Akershem, Esquire, of Yorkshire. Also, how the fair bride was married from the house of Hamilton Veneering, Esquire, of Stucconia, and was given away by Melvin Twemlow, Esquire, of Duke Street, St. James's, second cousin to Lord Snigsworth, of Snigsworthy Park. While perusing which composition, Twemlow makes some opaque approach to perceiving that if the Reverend Blank Blank and the Reverend Dash Dash fail, after this introduction, to become enrolled in the list of Veneering's dearest and oldest friends, they will have none but themselves to thank for it.

After which appears Sophronia (whom Twemlow

has seen twice in his lifetime), to thank Twemlow f
counterfeiting the late Horatio Akershem, Esqui
broadly of Yorkshire. And after her appears Alfr
(whom Twemlow has seen once in his lifetime),
do the same, and to make a pasty sort of glitter,
if he were constructed for candle-light only, and h
been let out into daylight by some grand mistak
And after that comes Mrs. Veneering, in a perv
ingly aquiline state of figure, and with transpare
little knobs on her temper, like the little transp
ent knob on the bridge of her nose, "worn out
worry and excitement," as she tells her dear M
Twemlow, and reluctantly revived with curaçoa
the Analytical. And, after that, the bridesmai
begin to come by railroad from various parts of t
country, and to come like adorable recruits enlist
by a sergeant not present; for, on arriving at t
Veneering depôt, they are in a barrack of strange

So, Twemlow goes home to Duke Street,
James's, to take a plate of mutton broth with
chop in it, and a look at the marriage service,
order that he may cut in at the right place
morrow: and he is low, and feels it dull over t
livery-stable yard, and is distinctly aware of a di
in his heart, made by the most adorable of t
adorable bridesmaids. For, the poor little harmle
gentleman once had his fancy, like the rest of
and she didn't answer (as she often does not), a
he thinks the adorable bridesmaid is like the fan
as she was then (which she is not at all), and th
if the fancy had not married some one else
money, but had married him for love, he and s
would have been happy (which they wouldn't ha
been), and that she has a tenderness for him st

(whereas her toughness is a proverb). Brooding over the fire, with his dried little head in his dried little hands, and his dried little elbows on his dried little knees, Twemlow is melancholy. "No Adorable to bear me company here!" thinks he. "No Adorable at the club! A waste, a waste, a waste, my Twemlow!" And so drops asleep, and has galvanic starts all over him.

Betimes next morning, that horrible old Lady Tippins (relict of the late Sir Thomas Tippins, knighted in mistake for somebody else by His Majesty King George the Third, who, while performing the ceremony, was graciously pleased to observe, "What, what, what? Who, who, who? Why, why, why?") begins to be dyed and varnished for the interesting occasion. She has a reputation for giving smart accounts of things, and she must be at these people's early, my dear, to lose nothing of the fun. Whereabout, in the bonnet and drapery announced by her name, any fragment of the real woman may be concealed, is perhaps known to her maid; but you could easily buy all you see of her in Bond Street; or you might scalp her, and peel her, and scrape her, and make two Lady Tippinses out of her, and yet not penetrate to the genuine article. She has a large gold eye-glass, has Lady Tippins, to survey the proceedings with. If she had one in each eye, it might keep that other drooping lid up, and look more uniform. But perennial youth is in her artificial flowers, and her list of lovers is full.

"Mortimer, you wretch," says Lady Tippins, turning the eye-glass about and about, "where is your charge, the bridegroom?"

"Give you my honor," returns Mortimer, "I don't know, and I don't care."

"Miserable! Is that the way you do your duty?"

"Beyond an impression that he is to sit upo my knee, and be seconded at some point of th solemnities, like a principal at a prize-fight, I assur you I have no notion what my duty is," return Mortimer.

Eugene is also in attendance, with a pervadin air upon him of having presupposed the ceremon to be a funeral, and of being disappointed. Th scene is the Vestry-room of St. James's Churc with a number of leathery old registers on shelve that might be bound in Lady Tippinses.

But, hark! A carriage at the gate, and Mortimer man arrives, looking rather like a spurious Mephi tophiles, and an unacknowledged member of th gentleman's family. Whom Lady Tippins, survey ing through her eye-glass, considers a fine man, an quite a catch; and of whom Mortimer remarks, i the lowest spirits, as he approaches, "I believe thi is my fellow, confound him!" More carriages a the gate, and lo, the rest of the characters. Who Lady Tippins, standing on a cushion, surveyin through the eye-glass, thus checks off: "Bride; fiv and-forty if a day, thirty shillings a yard, veil fiftee pound, pocket-handkerchief a present. Bridesmaid kept down for fear of outshining bride, consequentl not girls, twelve-and-sixpence a yard, Veneering flowers, snub-nosed one rather pretty, but too co scious of her stockings, bonnets three pound te Twemlow; blessed release for the dear man if sh really was his daughter, nervous even under the pr tence that she is, well he may be. Mrs. Veneering never saw such velvet, say two thousand pounds a she stands, absolute jeweller's window, father mus

have been a pawnbroker, or how could these people do it? Attendants; unknown, poky."

Ceremony performed, register signed, Lady Tippins escorted out of sacred edifice by Veneering, carriages rolling back to Stucconia, servants with favors and flowers, Veneering's house reached, drawing-rooms most magnificent. Here, the Podsnaps await the happy party; Mr. Podsnap, with his hair-brushes made the most of; that imperial rocking-horse, Mrs. Podsnap, majestically skittish. Here, too, are Boots and Brewer, and the two other Buffers; each Buffer with a flower in his button-hole, his hair curled, and his gloves buttoned on tight, apparently come prepared, if anything had happened to the bridegroom, to be married instantly. Here, too, the bride's aunt and next relation; a widowed female of a Medusa sort, in a stony cap, glaring petrifaction at her fellow-creatures. Here, too, the bride's trustee; an oil-cake-fed style of business gentleman with moony spectacles, and an object of much interest. Veneering launching himself upon this trustee as his oldest friend (which makes seven, Twemlow thought), and confidentially retiring with him into the conservatory, it is understood that Veneering is his co-trustee, and that they are arranging about the fortune. Buffers are even overheard to whisper Thir-ty Thou-sand Pou-nds! with a smack and a relish suggestive of the very finest oysters. Poky unknowns, amazed to find how intimately they knew Veneering, pluck up spirit, fold their arms, and begin to contradict him before breakfast. What time Mrs. Veneering, carrying baby dressed as a bridesmaid, flits about among the company, emitting flashes of many-colored lightning from diamonds, emeralds, and rubies.

The Analytical, in course of time achieving what he feels to be due to himself in bringing to a dignified conclusion several quarrels he has on hand with the pastry-cook's men, announces breakfast. Dining-room no less magnificent than drawing-room; tables superb; all the camels out, and all laden. Splendid cake, covered with Cupids, silver, and true-lovers' knots. Splendid bracelet, produced by Veneering before going down, and clasped upon the arm of bride. Yet nobody seems to think much more of the Veneerings than if they were a tolerable landlord and landlady doing the thing in the way of business at so much a head. The bride and bridegroom talk and laugh apart, as has always been their manner; and the Buffers work their way through the dishes with systematic perseverance, as has always been *their* manner; and the poky unknowns are exceedingly benevolent to one another in invitations to take glasses of champagne; but Mrs. Podsnap, arching her mane and rocking her grandest, has a far more deferential audience than Mrs. Veneering; and Podsnap all but does the honors.

Another dismal circumstance is, that Veneering, having the captivating Tippins on one side of him and the bride's aunt on the other, finds it immensely difficult to keep the peace. For, Medusa, besides unmistakingly glaring petrifaction at the fascinating Tippins, follows every lively remark made by that dear creature with an audible snort: which may be referable to a chronic cold in the head, but may also be referable to indignation and contempt. And this snort, being regular in its reproduction, at length comes to be expected by the company, who

make embarrassing pauses when it is falling due, and, by waiting for it, render it more emphatic when it comes. The stony aunt has likewise an injurious way of rejecting all dishes whereof Lady Tippins partakes: saying aloud, when they are proffered to her, "No, no, no, not for me. Take it away!" As with a set purpose of implying a misgiving that, if nourished upon similar meats, she might come to be like that charmer, which would be a fatal consummation. Aware of her enemy, Lady Tippins tries a youthful sally or two, and tries the eyeglass; but from the impenetrable cap and snorting armor of the stony aunt all weapons rebound powerless.

Another objectionable circumstance is, that the poky unknowns support each other in being unimpressible. They persist in not being frightened by the gold and silver camels, and they are banded together to defy the elaborately-chased ice-pails. They even seem to unite in some vague utterance of the sentiment that the landlord and landlady will make a pretty good profit out of this, and they almost carry themselves like customers. Nor is there compensating influence in the adorable bridesmaids; for, having very little interest in the bride, and none at all in one another, those lovely beings become, each one on her own account, depreciatingly contemplative of the millinery present; while the bridegroom's man, exhausted in the back of his chair, appears to be improving the occasion by penitentially contemplating all the wrong he has ever done; the difference between him and his friend Eugene being, that the latter, in the back of *his* chair, appears to be contemplating all the wrong

he would like to do — particularly to the present company.

In which state of affairs, the usual ceremonies rather droop and flag, and the splendid cake, when cut by the fair hand of the bride, has but an indigestible appearance. However, all the things indispensable to be said are said, and all the things indispensable to be done are done (including Lady Tippins's yawning, falling asleep, and waking insensible), and there is hurried preparation for the nuptial journey to the Isle of Wight, and the outer air teems with brass bands and spectators. In full sight of whom, the malignant star of the Analytical has pre-ordained that pain and ridicule shall befall him. For he, standing on the doorsteps to grace the departure, is suddenly caught a most prodigious thump on the side of his head with a heavy shoe, which a Buffer in the hall, champagne-flushed and wild of aim, has borrowed on the spur of the moment, from the pastry-cook's porter, to cast after the departing pair as an auspicious omen.

So they all go up again into the gorgeous drawing-rooms — all of them flushed with breakfast, as having taken scarlatina sociably — and there the combined unknowns do malignant things with their legs to ottomans, and take as much as possible out of the splendid furniture. And so, Lady Tippins, quite undetermined whether to-day is the day before yesterday, or the day after to-morrow, or the week after next, fades away; and Mortimer Lightwood and Eugene fade away, and Twemlow fades away, and the stony aunt goes away — she declines to fade, proving rock to the last — and even the unknowns are slowly strained off, and it is all over.

All over, that is to say, for the time being. But, there is another time to come, and it comes in about a fortnight, and it comes to Mr. and Mrs. Lammle on the sands of Shanklin, in the Isle of Wight.

Mr. and Mrs. Lammle have walked for some time on the Shanklin sands, and one may see by their footprints that they have not walked arm-in-arm, and that they have not walked in a straight track, and that they have walked in a moody humor; for the lady has prodded little spurting holes in the damp sand before her with her parasol, and the gentleman has trailed his stick after him. As if he were of the Mephistophiles family indeed, and had walked with a drooping tail.

"Do you mean to tell me, then, Sophronia"—

Thus he begins after a long silence, when Sophronia flashes fiercely, and turns upon him.

"Don't put it upon *me*, sir. I ask you, do *you* mean to tell me?"

Mr. Lammle falls silent again, and they walk as before. Mrs. Lammle opens her nostrils and bites her under lip; Mr. Lammle takes his gingerous whiskers in his left hand, and bringing them together, frowns furtively at his beloved, out of a thick gingerous bush.

"Do *I* mean to say!" Mrs. Lammle after a time repeats with indignation. "Putting it on me! The unmanly disingenuousness!"

Mr. Lammle stops, releases his whiskers, and looks at her. "The what?"

Mrs. Lammle haughtily replies, without stopping, and without looking back, "The meanness."

He is at her side again in a pace or two, and he retorts, "That is not what you said. You said disingenuousness."

"What if I did?"

"There is no 'if' in the case. You did."

"I did, then. And what of it?"

"What of it?" says Mr. Lammle. "Have you the face to utter the word to me?"

"The face, too!" replies Mrs. Lammle, staring at him with cold scorn. "Pray, how dare you, sir, utter the word to me?"

"I never did."

As this happens to be true, Mrs. Lammle is thrown on the feminine resource of saying, "I don't care what you uttered or did not utter."

After a little more walking and a little more silence, Mr. Lammle breaks the latter.

"You shall proceed in your own way. You claim a right to ask me, do I mean to tell you? Do I mean to tell you what?"

"That you are a man of property?"

"No."

"Then you married me on false pretences?"

"So be it. Next comes what you mean to say. Do you mean to say you are a woman of property?"

"No."

"Then you married me on false pretences."

"If you are so dull a fortune-hunter that you deceive yourself, or if you were so greedy and grasping that you were over-willing to be deceived by appearances, is it my fault, you adventurer?" the lady demands with great asperity.

"I asked Veneering, and he told me you were rich."

"Veneering!" with great contempt. "And what does Veneering know about me?"

"Was he not your trustee?"

"No. I have no trustee, but the one you saw on the day when you fraudulently married me. And his trust is not a very difficult one, for it is only an annuity of a hundred and fifteen pounds. I think there are some odd shillings or pence, if you are very particular."

Mr. Lammle bestows a by no means loving look upon the partner of his joys and sorrows, and he mutters something; but checks himself.

"Question for question. It is my turn again, Mrs. Lammle. What made you suppose me a man of property?"

"You made me suppose you so. Perhaps you will deny that you always presented yourself to me in that character?"

"But you asked somebody, too. Come, Mrs. Lammle, admission for admission. You asked somebody?"

"I asked Veneering."

"And Veneering knew as much of me as he knew of you, or as anybody knows of him."

After more silent walking, the bride stops short, to say in a passionate manner, —

"I never will forgive the Veneerings for this!"

"Neither will I," returns the bridegroom.

With that they walked again; she making those angry spurts in the sand; he dragging that dejected tail. The tide is low, and seems to have thrown them together high on the bare shore. A gull comes sweeping by their heads, and flouts them. There was a golden surface on the brown cliffs but now, and behold they are only damp earth. A taunting roar comes from the sea, and the far-out rollers mount upon one another, to look at the

entrapped impostors, and to join in impish and exultant gambols.

"Do you pretend to believe," Mrs. Lammle resumes sternly, "when you talk of my marrying you for worldly advantages, that it was within the bounds of reasonable probability that I would have married you for yourself?"

"Again there are two sides to the question, Mrs. Lammle. What do you pretend to believe?"

"So you first deceive me, and then insult me!" cries the lady, with a heaving bosom.

"Not at all. I have originated nothing. The double-edged question was yours."

"Was mine!" the bride repeats, and her parasol breaks in her angry hand.

His color has turned to a livid white, and ominous marks have come to light about his nose, as if the finger of the very devil himself had, within the last few moments, touched it here and there. But he has repressive power, and she has none.

"Throw it away," he coolly recommends as to the parasol; "you have made it useless; you look ridiculous with it."

Whereupon she calls him, in her rage, "a deliberate villain," and so casts the broken thing from her as that it strikes him in falling. The finger-marks are something whiter for the instant, but he walks on at her side.

She bursts into tears, declaring herself the wretchedest, the most deceived, the worst-used of women. Then she says that, if she had the courage to kill herself, she would do it. Then she calls him vile impostor. Then she asks him why, in the disappointment of his base speculation, he does not

take her life with his own hand, under the present favorable circumstances. Then she cries again. Then she is enraged again, and makes some mention of swindlers. Finally, she sits down crying on a block of stone, and is in all the known and unknown humors of her sex at once. Pending her changes, those aforesaid marks in his face have come and gone, now here now there, like white stops of a pipe on which the diabolical performer has played a tune. Also, his livid lips are parted at last, as if he were breathless with running. Yet he is not.

"Now, get up, Mrs. Lammle, and let us speak reasonably."

She sits upon her stone, and takes no heed of him.

"Get up, I tell you."

Raising her head, she looks contemptuously in his face, and repeats, "You tell me! Tell me, forsooth!"

She affects not to know that his eyes are fastened on her as she droops her head again; but her whole figure reveals that she knows it uneasily.

"Enough of this. Come! Do you hear? Get up."

Yielding to his hand, she rises, and they walk again; but this time with their faces turned towards their place of residence.

"Mrs. Lammle, we have both been deceiving, and we have both been deceived. We have both been biting, and we have both been bitten. In a nutshell, there's the state of the case."

"You sought me out"—

"Tut! Let us have done with that. *We* know

very well how it was. Why should you and I talk about it, when you and I can't disguise it? To proceed. I am disappointed, and cut a poor figure."

"Am I no one?"

"Some one — and I was coming to you, if you had waited a moment. You, too, are disappointed, and cut a poor figure."

"An injured figure!"

"You are now cool enough, Sophronia, to see that you can't be injured without my being equally injured; and that therefore the mere word is not to the purpose. When I look back, I wonder how I can have been such a fool as to take you to so great an extent upon trust."

"And when I look back" — the bride cries, interrupting.

"And when you look back, you wonder how you can have been — you'll excuse the word?"

"Most certainly, with so much reason."

"— Such a fool as to take *me* to so great an extent upon trust. But the folly is committed on both sides. I cannot get rid of you; you cannot get rid of me. What follows?"

"Shame and misery," the bride bitterly replies.

"I don't know. A mutual understanding follows, and I think it may carry us through. Here I split my discourse (give me your arm, Sophronia) into three heads, to make it shorter and plainer. Firstly, it's enough to have been done, without the mortification of being known to have been done. So we agree to keep the fact to ourselves. You agree?"

"If it is possible, I do."

"Possible! We have pretended well enough to one another. Can't we, united, pretend to the

world? Agreed. Secondly, we owe the Veneerings a grudge, and we owe all other people the grudge of wishing them to be taken in, as we ourselves have been taken in. Agreed?"

"Yes. Agreed."

"We come smoothly to thirdly. You have called me an adventurer, Sophronia. So I am. In plain, uncomplimentary English, so I am. So are you, my dear. So are many people. We agree to keep our own secret, and to work together in furtherance of our own schemes."

"What schemes?"

"Any scheme that will bring us money. By our own schemes I mean our joint interest. Agreed?"

She answers after a little hesitation, "I suppose so. Agreed."

"Carried at once, you see! Now, Sophronia, only half a dozen words more. We know one another perfectly. Don't be tempted into twitting me with the past knowledge that you have of me, because it is identical with the past knowledge I have of you, and, in twitting me, you twit yourself, and I don't want to hear you do it. With this good understanding established between us, it is better never done. To wind up all: You have shown temper to-day, Sophronia. Don't be betrayed into doing so again, because I have a Devil of a temper myself."

So, the happy pair, with this hopeful marriage contract thus signed, sealed, and delivered, repair homeward. If, when those infernal finger-marks were on the white and breathless countenance of Alfred Lammle, Esquire, they denoted that he conceived the purpose of subduing his dear wife, Mrs. Alfred Lammle, by at once divesting her of any

lingering reality or pretence of self-respect, the purpose would seem to have been presently executed. The mature young lady has mighty little need of powder, now, for her downcast face, as he escorts her in the light of the setting sun to their abode of bliss.

CHAPTER XI.

PODSNAPPERY.

Mr. Podsnap was well to do, and stood very high in Mr. Podsnap's opinion. Beginning with a good inheritance, he had married a good inheritance, and had thriven exceedingly in the Marine Insurance way, and was quite satisfied. He never could make out why everybody was not quite satisfied, and he felt conscious that he set a brilliant social example in being particularly well satisfied with most things, and, above all other things, with himself.

Thus happily acquainted with his own merit and importance, Mr. Podsnap settled that whatever he put behind him he put out of existence. There was a dignified conclusiveness — not to add a grand convenience — in this way of getting rid of disagreeables, which had done much towards establishing Mr. Podsnap in his lofty place in Mr. Podsnap's satisfaction. "I don't want to know about it; I don't choose to discuss it; I don't admit it!" Mr. Podsnap had even acquired a peculiar flourish of his right arm in often clearing the world of its most difficult problems, by sweeping them behind him (and consequently sheer away) with those words and a flushed face. For they affronted him.

Mr. Podsnap's world was not a very large world, morally; no, nor even geographically: seeing that, although his business was sustained upon commerce with other countries, he considered other countries, with that important reservation, a mistake, and of their manners and customs would conclusively observe, "Not English!" when, PRESTO! with a flourish of the arm, and a flush of the face, they were swept away. Elsewise, the world got up at eight, shaved close at a quarter past, breakfasted at nine, went to the City at ten, came home at half-past five, and dined at seven. Mr. Podsnap's notions of the Arts in their integrity might have been stated thus. Literature; large print, respectfully descriptive of getting up at eight, shaving close at a quarter past, breakfasting at nine, going to the City at ten, coming home at half-past five, and dining at seven. Painting and Sculpture; models and portraits representing Professors of getting up at eight, shaving close at a quarter past, breakfasting at nine, going to the City at ten, coming home at half-past five, and dining at seven. Music; a respectable performance (without variations) on stringed and wind instruments, sedately expressive of getting up at eight, shaving close at a quarter past, breakfasting at nine, going to the City at ten, coming home at half-past five, and dining at seven. Nothing else to be permitted to those same vagrants the Arts, on pain of excommunication. Nothing else To Be — anywhere!

As a so eminently respectable man, Mr. Podsnap was sensible of its being required of him to take Providence under his protection. Consequently, he always knew exactly what Providence meant. In-

ferior and less respectable men might fall short of that mark, but Mr. Podsnap was always up to it. And it was very remarkable (and must have been very comfortable) that what Providence meant was invariably what Mr. Podsnap meant.

These may be said to have been the articles of a faith and school which the present chapter takes the liberty of calling, after its representative man, Podsnappery. They were confined within close bounds, as Mr. Podsnap's own head was confined by his shirt collar; and they were enunciated with a sounding pomp that smacked of the creaking of Mr. Podsnap's own boots.

There was a Miss Podsnap. And this young rocking-horse was being trained in her mother's art of prancing in a stately manner without ever getting on. But the high parental action was not yet imparted to her, and in truth she was but an under-sized damsel, with high shoulders, low spirits, chilled elbows, and a rasped surface of nose, who seemed to take occasional frosty peeps out of childhood into womanhood, and to shrink back again, overcome by her mother's head-dress and her father from head to foot — crushed by the mere dead weight of Podsnappery.

A certain institution in Mr. Podsnap's mind, which he called "the young person," may be considered to have been embodied in Miss Podsnap, his daughter. It was an inconvenient and exacting institution, as requiring everything in the universe to be filed down and fitted to it. The question about everything was, Would it bring a blush into the cheek of the young person? And the inconvenience of the young person was, that, according

to Mr. Podsnap, she seemed always liable to burst into blushes when there was no need at all. There appeared to be no line of demarcation between the young person's excessive innocence, and another person's guiltiest knowledge. Take Mr. Podsnap's word for it, and the soberest tints of drab, white, lilac and gray were all flaming red to this troublesome Bull of a young person.

The Podsnaps lived in a shady angle adjoining Portman Square. They were a kind of people certain to dwell in the shade, wherever they dwelt. Miss Podsnap's life had been, from her first appearance on this planet, altogether of a shady order; for, Mr. Podsnap's young person was likely to get little good out of association with other young persons, and had, therefore, been restricted to companionship with not very congenial older persons, and with massive furniture. Miss Podsnap's early views of life being principally derived from the reflections of it in her father's boots, and in the walnut and rosewood tables of the dim drawing-rooms, and in their swarthy giants of looking-glasses, were of a sombre cast; and it was not wonderful that now, when she was on most days solemnly tooled through the Park by the side of her mother in a great, tall, custard-colored phaeton, she showed above the apron of that vehicle like a dejected young person sitting up in a bed to take a startled look at things in general, and very strongly desiring to get her head under the counterpane again.

Said Mr. Podsnap to Mrs. Podsnap, "Georgiana is almost eighteen."

Said Mrs. Podsnap to Mr. Podsnap, assenting, "Almost eighteen."

Said Mr. Podsnap then to Mrs. Podsnap, "Really I think we should have some people on Georgiana's birthday."

Said Mrs. Podsnap then to Mr. Podsnap, "Which will enable us to clear off all those people who are due."

So it came to pass that Mr. and Mrs. Podsnap requested the honor of the company of seventeen friends of their souls at dinner; and that they substituted other friends of their souls for such of the seventeen original friends of their souls as deeply regretted that a prior engagement prevented their having the honor of dining with Mr. and Mrs. Podsnap, in pursuance of their kind invitation; and that Mrs. Podsnap said of all these inconsolable personages, as she checked them off with a pencil in her list, "Asked, at any rate, and got rid of;" and that they successfully disposed of a good many friends of their souls in this way, and felt their consciences much lightened.

There were still other friends of their souls who were not entitled to be asked to dinner, but had a claim to be invited to come and take a haunch-of-mutton vapor bath at half-past nine. For the clearing off of these worthies, Mrs. Podsnap added a small and early evening to the dinner, and looked in at the music-shop to bespeak a well-conducted automaton to come and play quadrilles for a carpet dance.

Mr. and Mrs. Veneering, and Mr. and Mrs. Veneering's brand-new bride and bridegroom, were of the dinner company; but the Podsnap establishment had nothing else in common with the Veneerings. Mr. Podsnap could tolerate taste in a mush-

room man who stood in need of that sort of thing, but was far above it himself. Hideous solidity was the characteristic of the Podsnap plate. Everything was made to look as heavy as it could, and to take up as much room as possible. Everything said boastfully, "Here you have as much of me in my ugliness as if I were only lead; but I am so many ounces of precious metal, worth so much an ounce; — wouldn't you like to melt me down?" A corpulent, straddling épergne, blotched all over as if it had broken out in an eruption rather than been ornamented, delivered this address from an unsightly silver platform in the centre of the table. Four silver wine coolers, each furnished with four staring heads, each head obtrusively carrying a big silver ring in each of its ears, conveyed the sentiment up and down the table, and handed it on to the pot-bellied silver salt-cellars. All the big silver spoons and forks widened the mouths of the company expressly for the purpose of thrusting the sentiment down their throats with every morsel they ate.

The majority of the guests were like the plate, and included several heavy articles weighing ever so much. But there was a foreign gentleman among them: whom Mr. Podsnap had invited after much debate with himself — believing the whole European continent to be in mortal alliance against the young person — and there was a droll disposition, not only on the part of Mr. Podsnap, but of everybody else, to treat him as if he were a child who was hard of hearing.

As a delicate concession to this unfortunately-born foreigner, Mr. Podsnap, in receiving him, had

presented his wife as "Madame Podsnap;" also his daughter as "Mademoiselle Podsnap," with some inclination to add "ma fille," in which bold venture, however, he checked himself. The Veneerings being at that time the only other arrivals, he had added (in a condescendingly explanatory manner), "Monsieur Vey-nair-reeng," and had then subsided into English.

"How Do You Like London?" Mr. Podsnap now inquired from his station of host, as if he were administering something in the nature of a powder or potion to the deaf child; "London, Londres, London?"

The foreign gentleman admired it.

"You find it Very Large?" said Mr. Podsnap spaciously.

The foreign gentleman found it very large.

"And Very Rich?"

The foreign gentleman found it, without doubt, énormément riche.

"Enormously Rich, We say," returned Mr. Podsnap, in a condescending manner. "Our English adverbs do not terminate in Mong, and We Pronounce the 'ch' as if there were a 't' before it. We Say Ritch."

"Reetch," remarked the foreign gentleman.

"And Do You Find, Sir," pursued Mr. Podsnap with dignity, "Many Evidences that Strike You of our British Constitution in the Streets Of The World's Metropolis, London, Londres, London?"

The foreign gentleman begged to be pardoned, but did not altogether understand.

"The Constitution Britannique," Mr. Podsnap explained, as if he were teaching in an infant

school. "We Say British, But You Say Britannique, You Know" (forgivingly, as if that were not his fault). "The Constitution, Sir."

The foreign gentleman said, "Mais, yees; I know eem."

A youngish, sallowish gentleman in spectacles, with a lumpy forehead, seated in a supplementary chair at a corner of the table, here caused a profound sensation by saying, in a raised voice, "Ekker," and then stopping dead.

"Mais oui," said the foreign gentleman, turning towards him. "Est-ce que? Quoi donc?"

But the gentleman with the lumpy forehead, having for the time delivered himself of all that he found behind his lumps, spake for the time no more.

"I Was Inquiring," said Mr. Podsnap, resuming the thread of his discourse, "Whether You Have Observed in our Streets as We should say, Upon our Pavvy as You would say, any Tokens" —

The foreign gentleman with patient courtesy entreated pardon: "But what was tokenz?"

"Marks," said Mr. Podsnap; "Signs, you know, Appearances — Traces."

"Ah! of a 'Orse?" inquired the foreign gentleman.

"We call it Horse," said Mr. Podsnap, with forbearance. "In England, Angleterre, England, We Aspirate the 'H,' and We Say 'Horse.' Only our Lower Classes Say ''Orse!'"

"Pardon," said the foreign gentleman; "I am alwiz wrong."

"Our Language," said Mr. Podsnap, with a gracious consciousness of being always right, "is

Difficult. Ours is a Copious Language, and Trying to Strangers. I will not Pursue my Question."

But the lumpy gentleman, unwilling to give it up, again madly said "Esker," and again spake no more.

"It merely referred," Mr. Podsnap explained, with a sense of meritorious proprietorship, "to Our Constitution, Sir. We Englishmen are Very Proud of our Constitution, Sir. It Was Bestowed Upon Us By Providence. No Other Country is so Favored as This Country."

"And ozer countries"—the foreign gentleman was beginning, when Mr. Podsnap put him right again.

"We do not say Ozer; we say Other: the letters are 'T' and 'H;' you say Tay and Aish, You Know" (still with clemency). "The sound is 'th'—'th!'"

"And *oth*er countries," said the foreign gentleman. "They do how?"

"They do, Sir," returned Mr. Podsnap, gravely shaking his head, "they do—I am sorry to be obliged to say it—*as* they do."

"It was a little particular of Providence," said the foreign gentleman, laughing; "for the frontier is not large."

"Undoubtedly," assented Mr. Podsnap; "But So it is. It was the Charter of the Land. This Island was Blessed, Sir, to the Direct Exclusion of such Other Countries as—as there may happen to be. And if we were all Englishmen present, I would say," added Mr. Podsnap, looking round upon his compatriots, and sounding solemnly with his theme, "that there is in the Englishman a combination of qualities, a modesty, an independence, a responsi-

bility, a repose, combined with an absence of everything calculated to call a blush into the cheek of a young person, which one would seek in vain among the Nations of the Earth."

Having delivered this little summary, Mr. Podsnap's face flushed as he thought of the remote possibility of its being at all qualified by any prejudiced citizen of any other country; and, with his favorite right-arm flourish, he put the rest of Europe, and the whole of Asia, Africa, and America, nowhere.

The audience were much edified by this passage of words; and Mr. Podsnap, feeling that he was in rather remarkable force to-day, became smiling and conversational.

"Has anything more been heard, Veneering," he inquired, "of the lucky legatee?"

"Nothing more," returned Veneering, "than that he has come into possession of the property. I am told people now call him The Golden Dustman. I mentioned to you some time ago, I think, that the young lady whose intended husband was murdered is daughter to a clerk of mine?"

"Yes, you told me that," said Podsnap; "and, by the by, I wish you would tell it again here, for it's a curious coincidence — curious that the first news of the discovery should have been brought straight to your table (when I was there), and curious that one of your people should have been so nearly interested in it. Just relate that, will you?"

Veneering was more than ready to do it, for he had prospered exceedingly upon the Harmon Murder, and had turned the social distinction it conferred upon him to the account of making several

dozen of brand-new bosom friends. Indeed, such another lucky hit would almost have set him up in that way to his satisfaction. So, addressing himself to the most desirable of his neighbors, while Mrs. Veneering secured the next most desirable, he plunged into the case, and emerged from it twenty minutes afterwards with a Bank Director in his arms. In the mean time, Mrs. Veneering had dived into the same waters for a wealthy Ship-Broker, and had brought him up, safe and sound, by the hair. Then Mrs. Veneering had to relate, to a larger circle, how she had been to see the girl, and how she was really pretty, and (considering her station) presentable. And this she did with such a successful display of her eight aquiline fingers and their encircling jewels, that she happily laid hold of a drifting General Officer, his wife and daughter, and not only restored their animation, which had become suspended, but made them lively friends within an hour.

Although Mr. Podsnap would in a general way have highly disapproved of Bodies in rivers, as ineligible topics with reference to the cheek of the young person, he had, as one may say, a share in this affair which made him a part proprietor. As its returns were immediate, too, in the way of restraining the company from speechless contemplation of the wine coolers, it paid, and he was satisfied.

And now the haunch-of-mutton vapor bath, having received a gamely infusion, and a few last touches of sweets and coffee, was quite ready, and the bathers came; but not before the discreet automaton had got behind the bars of the piano music desk, and there presented the appearance of a captive

languishing in a rosewood jail. And who now so pleasant or so well assorted as Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Lammle, he all sparkle, she all gracious contentment, both at occasional intervals exchanging looks like partners at cards who played a game against All England?

There was not much youth among the bathers, but there was no youth (the young person always excepted) in the articles of Podsnappery. Bald bathers folded their arms and talked to Mr. Podsnap on the hearth-rug; sleek-whiskered bathers, with hats in their hands, lunged at Mrs. Podsnap and retreated; prowling bathers went about looking into ornamental boxes and bowls, as if they had suspicions of larceny on the part of the Podsnaps, and expected to find something they had lost at the bottom; bathers of the gentler sex sat silently comparing ivory shoulders. All this time and always, poor little Miss Podsnap, whose tiny efforts (if she had made any) were swallowed up in the magnificence of her mother's rocking, kept herself as much out of sight and mind as she could, and appeared to be counting on many dismal returns of the day. It was somehow understood, as a secret article in the state proprieties of Podsnappery, that nothing must be said about the day. Consequently this young damsel's nativity was hushed up and looked over, as if it were agreed on all hands that it would have been better that she had never been born.

The Lammles were so fond of the dear Veneerings, that they could not for some time detach themselves from those excellent friends; but at length, either a very open smile on Mr. Lammle's part, or a very

secret elevation of one of his gingerous eyebrows — certainly the one or the other — seemed to say to Mrs. Lammle, "Why don't you play?" And so, looking about her, she saw Miss Podsnap, and seeming to say responsively, "That card?" and to be answered, "Yes," went and sat beside Miss Podsnap.

Mrs. Lammle was overjoyed to escape into a corner for a little quiet talk.

It promised to be a very quiet talk, for Miss Podsnap replied in a flutter, "Oh! Indeed it's very kind of you, but I am afraid I *don't* talk."

"Let us make a beginning," said the insinuating Mrs. Lammle, with her best smile.

"Oh! I'm afraid you'll find me very dull. But ma talks!"

That was plainly to be seen, for ma was talking then at her usual canter, with arched head and mane, opened eyes and nostrils.

"Fond of reading, perhaps?"

"Yes. At least, I — don't mind that so much," returned Miss Podsnap.

"M—m—m—m—music." So insinuating was Mrs. Lammle, that she got half a dozen m's into the word before she got it out.

"I haven't nerve to play, even if I could. Ma plays."

(At exactly the same canter, and with a certain flourishing appearance of doing something, ma did, in fact, occasionally take a rock upon the instrument.)

"Of course you like dancing?"

"Oh no, I don't!" said Miss Podsnap.

"No? With your youth and attractions? Truly, my dear, you surprise me!"

"I can't say," observed Miss Podsnap, after hesitating considerably, and stealing several timid looks at Mrs. Lammle's carefully-arranged face, "how I might have liked it if I had been a — you won't mention it, *will* you?"

"My dear! Never!"

"No, I am sure you won't. I can't say, then, how I should have liked it if I had been a chimney-sweep on May-day."

"Gracious!" was the exclamation which amazement elicited from Mrs. Lammle.

"There! I knew you'd wonder. But you won't mention it, will you?"

"Upon my word, my love," said Mrs. Lammle, "you make me ten times more desirous, now I talk to you, to know you well, than I was when I sat over yonder looking at you. How I wish we could be real friends! Try me as a real friend. Come! Don't fancy me a frumpy old married woman, my dear; I was married but the other day, you know; I am dressed as a bride now, you see. About the chimney-sweeps?"

"Hush! ma'll hear."

"She can't hear from where she sits."

"Don't you be too sure of that," said Miss Podsnap in a lower voice. "Well, what I mean is, that they seem to enjoy it."

"And that perhaps you would have enjoyed it, if you had been one of them?"

Miss Podsnap nodded significantly.

"Then you don't enjoy it now?"

"How is it possible?" said Miss Podsnap. "Oh, it is such a dreadful thing! If I was wicked enough — and strong enough — to kill anybody, it should be my partner."

This was such an entirely new view of the Terpsichorean art as socially practised, that Mrs. Lammle looked at her young friend in some astonishment. Her young friend sat nervously twiddling her fingers in a pinioned attitude, as if she were trying to hide her elbows. But this latter Utopian object (in short sleeves) always appeared to be the great inoffensive aim of her existence.

"It sounds horrid, don't it?" said Miss Podsnap with a penitential face.

Mrs. Lammle, not very well knowing what to answer, resolved herself into a look of smiling encouragement.

"But it is, and it always has been," pursued Miss Podsnap, "such a trial to me! I so dread being awful. And it is so awful! No one knows what I suffered at Madame Sauteuse's, where I learned to dance and make presentation courtesies, and other dreadful things — or at least where they tried to teach me. Ma can do it."

"At any rate, my love," said Mrs. Lammle soothingly, "that's over."

"Yes, it's over," returned Miss Podsnap, "but there's nothing gained by that. It's worse here than at Madame Sauteuse's. Ma was there, and ma's here; but pa wasn't there, and company wasn't there, and there were not real partners there. Oh, there's ma speaking to the man at the piano! Oh, there's ma going up to somebody! Oh, I know she's going to bring him to me! Oh, please don't, please don't, please don't! Oh, keep away, keep away!" These pious ejaculations Miss Podsnap uttered with her eyes closed, and her head leaning back against the wall.

But the Ogre advanced under the pilotage of ma, and ma said, "Georgiana, Mr. Grompus," and the Ogre clutched his victim, and bore her off to his castle in the top couple. Then the discreet automaton, who had surveyed his ground, played a blossomless, tuneless "set," and sixteen disciples of Podsnappery went through the figures of — 1, Getting up at eight and shaving close at a quarter past — 2, Breakfasting at nine — 3, Going to the City at ten — 4, Coming home at half-past five — 5, Dining at seven, and the grand chain.

While these solemnities were in progress, Mr. Alfred Lammle (most loving of husbands) approached the chair of Mrs. Alfred Lammle (most loving of wives), and bending over the back of it, trifled for some few seconds with Mrs. Lammle's bracelet. Slightly in contrast with this brief airy toying, one might have noticed a certain dark attention in Mrs. Lammle's face, as she said some words with her eyes on Mr. Lammle's waistcoat, and seemed in return to receive some lesson. But it was all done as a breath passes from a mirror.

And now, the grand chain riveted to the last link, the discreet automaton ceased, and the sixteen, two and two, took a walk among the furniture. And herein the unconsciousness of the Ogre Grompus was pleasantly conspicuous; for, that complacent monster, believing that he was giving Miss Podsnap a treat, prolonged to the utmost stretch of possibility a peripatetic account of an archery meeting; while his victim, heading the procession of sixteen as it slowly circled about, like a revolving funeral, never raised her eyes except once to steal a glance at Mrs. Lammle, expressive of intense despair.

At length the procession was dissolved by the violent arrival of a nutmeg, before which the drawing-room door bounced open as if it were a cannon-ball; and while that fragrant article, dispersed through several glasses of colored warm water, was going the round of society, Miss Podsnap returned to her seat by her new friend.

"Oh, my goodness!" said Miss Podsnap. "*That's* over! I hope you didn't look at me!"

"My dear, why not?"

"Oh, I know all about myself!" said Miss Podsnap.

"I'll tell you something *I* know about you, my dear," returned Mrs. Lammle in her winning way, "and that is, you are most unnecessarily shy."

"Ma ain't," said Miss Podsnap. — "I detest you! Go along!" This shot was levelled under her breath at the gallant Grompus for bestowing an insinuating smile upon her in passing.

"Pardon me if I scarcely see, my dear Miss Podsnap" — Mrs. Lammle was beginning, when the young lady interposed.

"If we are going to be real friends (and I suppose we are, for you are the only person who ever proposed it), don't let us be awful. It's awful enough to *be* Miss Podsnap, without being called so. Call me Georgiana."

"Dearest Georgiana," Mrs. Lammle began again.

"Thank you," said Miss Podsnap.

"Dearest Georgiana, pardon me if I scarcely see, my love, why your mamma's not being shy is a reason why you should be."

"Don't you really see that?" asked Miss Podsnap, plucking at her fingers in a troubled manner,

and furtively casting her eyes now on Mrs. Lammle, now on the ground. "Then perhaps it isn't?"

"My dearest Georgiana, you defer much too readily to my poor opinion. Indeed, it is not even an opinion, darling, for it is only a confession of my dulness."

"Oh! *you* are not dull," returned Miss Podsnap. "*I* am dull, but you couldn't have made me talk if you were."

Some little touch of conscience, answering this perception of her having gained a purpose, called bloom enough into Mrs. Lammle's face to make it look brighter as she sat smiling her best smile on her dear Georgiana, and shaking her head with an affectionate playfulness. Not that it meant anything, but that Georgiana seemed to like it.

"What I mean is," pursued Georgiana, "that ma being so endowed with awfulness, and pa being so endowed with awfulness, and there being so much awfulness everywhere — I mean, at least, everywhere where I am — perhaps it makes me, who am so deficient in awfulness, and frightened at it — I say it very badly — I don't know whether you can understand what I mean?"

"Perfectly, dearest Georgiana!" Mrs. Lammle was proceeding with every reassuring wile, when the head of that young lady suddenly went back against the wall again, and her eyes closed.

"Oh, there's ma being awful with somebody with a glass in his eye! Oh, I know she's going to bring him here! Oh, don't bring him, don't bring him! Oh, he'll be my partner with his glass in his eye! Oh, what shall I do?" This time Georgiana accompanied her ejaculations with taps of her feet

upon the floor, and was altogether in quite a desperate condition. But, there was no escape from the majestic Mrs. Podsnap's production of an ambling stranger, with one eye screwed up into extinction, and the other framed and glazed, who, having looked down out of that organ, as if he descried Miss Podsnap at the bottom of some perpendicular shaft, brought her to the surface, and ambled off with her. And then the captive at the piano played another "set," expressive of his mournful aspirations after freedom, and other sixteen went through the former melancholy motions, and the ambler took Miss Podsnap for a furniture walk, as if he had struck out an entirely original conception.

In the mean time a stray personage of a meek demeanor, who had wandered to the hearth-rug, and got among the heads of tribes assembled there in conference with Mr. Podsnap, eliminated Mr. Podsnap's flush and flourish by a highly unpolite remark; no less than a reference to the circumstance that some half-dozen people had lately died in the streets of starvation. It was clearly ill-timed after dinner. It was not adapted to the cheek of the young person. It was not in good taste.

"I don't believe it," said Mr. Podsnap, putting it behind him.

The meek man was afraid we must take it as proved, because there were the Inquests and the Registrar's returns.

"Then it was their own fault," said Mr. Podsnap.

Veneering and other elders of tribes commended this way out of it. At once a short cut and a broad road.

The man of meek demeanor intimated that truly it would seem, from the facts, as if starvation had been forced upon the culprits in question — as if, in their wretched manner, they had made their weak protests against it — as if they would have taken the liberty of staving it off if they could — as if they would rather not have been starved upon the whole, if perfectly agreeable to all parties.

"There is not," said Mr. Podsnap, flushing angrily, "there is not a country in the world, sir, where so noble a provision is made for the poor as in this country."

The meek man was quite willing to concede that, but perhaps it rendered the matter even worse, as showing that there must be something appallingly wrong somewhere.

"Where?" said Mr. Podsnap.

The meek man hinted, Wouldn't it be well to try, very seriously, to find out where?

"Ah!" said Mr. Podsnap. "Easy to say somewhere; not so easy to say where! But I see what you are driving at. I knew it from the first. Centralization. No. Never with my consent. Not English."

An approving murmur arose from the heads of tribes; as saying, "There you have him! Hold him!"

He was not aware (the meek man submitted of himself) that he was driving at any ization. He had no favorite ization that he knew of. But he certainly was more staggered by these terrible occurrences than he was by names, of howsoever so many syllables. Might he ask, was dying of destitution and neglect necessarily English?

"You know what the population of London is, I suppose?" said Mr. Podsnap.

The meek man supposed he did, but supposed that had absolutely nothing to do with it, if its laws were well administered.

"And you know; at least, I hope you know," said Mr. Podsnap with severity, "that Providence has declared that you shall have the poor always with you?"

The meek man also hoped he knew that.

"I am glad to hear it," said Mr. Podsnap with a portentous air. "I am glad to hear it. It will render you cautious how you fly in the face of Providence."

In reference to that absurd and irreverent conventional phrase, the meek man said, for which Mr. Podsnap was not responsible, he the meek man had no fear of doing anything so impossible; but —

But Mr. Podsnap felt that the time had come for flushing and flourishing this meek man down for good. So he said, —

"I must decline to pursue this painful discussion. It is not pleasant to my feelings; it is repugnant to my feelings. I have said that I do not admit these things. I have also said that, if they do occur (not that I admit it), the fault lies with the sufferers themselves. It is not for *me*" — Mr. Podsnap pointed "me" forcibly, as adding by implication, though it may be all very well for *you* — "it is not for me to impugn the workings of Providence. I know better than that, I trust, and I have mentioned what the intentions of Providence are. Besides," said Mr. Podsnap, flushing high up among his hair-brushes, with a strong consciousness of personal

affront, "the subject is a very disagreeable one. I will go so far as to say it is an odious one. It is not one to be introduced among our wives and young persons, and I" — He finished with that flourish of his arm which added more expressively than any words, And I remove it from the face of the earth.

Simultaneously with this quenching of the meek man's ineffectual fire, Georgiana, having left the ambler up a lane of sofa, in a No Thoroughfare of back drawing-room, to find his own way out, came back to Mrs. Lammle. And who should be with Mrs. Lammle but Mr. Lammle? So fond of her!

"Alfred, my love, here is my friend. Georgiana, dearest girl, you must like my husband next to me."

Mr. Lammle was proud to be so soon distinguished by this special commendation to Miss Podsnap's favor. But if Mr. Lammle were prone to be jealous of his dear Sophronia's friendships, he would be jealous of her feeling towards Miss Podsnap.

"Say Georgiana, darling," interposed his wife.

"Towards — shall I? — Georgiana." Mr. Lammle uttered the name, with a delicate curve of his right hand, from his lips outward. "For never have I known Sophronia (who is not apt to take sudden likings) so attracted and so captivated as she is by — shall I once more? — Georgiana."

The object of this homage sat uneasily enough in receipt of it, and then said, turning to Mrs. Lammle, much embarrassed, —

"I wonder what you like me for! I am sure I can't think."

"Dearest Georgiana, for yourself. For your difference from all around you."

"Well! That may be. For I think I like you for your difference from all around me," said Georgiana with a smile of relief.

"We must be going with the rest," observed Mrs. Lammle, rising with a show of unwillingness, amidst a general dispersal. "We are real friends, Georgiana dear?"

"Real."

"Good-night, dear girl!"

She had established an attraction over the shrinking nature upon which her smiling eyes were fixed, for Georgiana held her hand while she answered in a secret and half-frightened tone, —

"Don't forget me when you are gone away. And come again soon. Good-night!"

Charming to see Mr. and Mrs. Lammle taking leave so gracefully, and going down the stairs so lovingly and sweetly. Not quite so charming to see their smiling faces fall and brood as they dropped moodily into separate corners of their little carriage. But, to be sure, that was a sight behind the scenes which nobody saw, and which nobody was meant to see.

Certain big, heavy vehicles, built on the model of the Podsnap plate, took away the heavy articles of guests weighing ever so much; and the less valuable articles got away after their various manners; and the Podsnap plate was put to bed. As Mr. Podsnap stood with his back to the drawing-room fire, pulling up his shirt collar, like a veritable cock of the walk literally pluming himself in the midst of his possessions, nothing would have astonished him more than an intimation that Miss Podsnap or any other young person properly born and bred, could not be

exactly put away like the plate, brought out like the plate, polished like the plate, counted, weighed, and valued like the plate. That such a young person could possibly have a morbid vacancy in the heart for anything younger than the plate, or less monotonous than the plate; or that such a young person's thoughts could try to scale the region bounded on the north, south, east, and west by the plate; was a monstrous imagination which he would on the spot have flourished into space. This, perhaps, in some sort arose from Mr. Podsnap's blushing young person being, so to speak, all cheek: whereas there is a possibility that there may be young persons of a rather more complex organization.

If Mr. Podsnap, pulling up his shirt collar, could only have heard himself called "that fellow" in a certain short dialogue, which passed between Mr. and Mrs. Lammle in their opposite corners of their little carriage, rolling home!

"Sophronia, are you awake?"

"Am I likely to be asleep, sir?"

"Very likely, I should think, after that fellow's company. Attend to what I am going to say."

"I have attended to what you have already said, have I not? What else have I been doing all to-night?"

"Attend, I tell you" (in a raised voice), "to what I am going to say. Keep close to that idiot girl. Keep her under your thumb. You have her fast, and you are not to let her go. Do you hear?"

"I hear you."

"I foresee there is money to be made out of this,

besides taking that fellow down a peg. We owe each other money, you know."

Mrs. Lammle winced a little at the reminder, but only enough to shake her scents and essences anew into the atmosphere of the little carriage, as she settled herself afresh in her own dark corner.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SWEAT OF AN HONEST MAN'S BROW.

Mr. Mortimer Lightwood and Mr. Eugene Wrayburn took a coffee-house dinner together in Mr. Lightwood's office. They had newly agreed to set up a joint establishment together. They had taken a bachelor cottage near Hampton, on the brink of the Thames, with a lawn, and a boat-house, and all things fitting, and were to float with the stream through the summer and the Long Vacation.

It was not summer yet, but spring; and it was not gentle spring ethereally mild, as in Thomson's Seasons, but nipping spring with an easterly wind, as in Johnson's, Jackson's, Dickson's, Smith's, and Jones's Seasons. The grating wind sawed rather than blew; and, as it sawed, the sawdust whirled about the saw-pit. Every street was a saw-pit, and there were no top-sawyers; every passenger was an under-sawyer, with the sawdust blinding him and choking him.

That mysterious paper currency, which circulates in London when the wind blows, gyrated here and there and everywhere. Whence can it come, whither can it go? It hangs on every bush, flutters in every tree, is caught flying by the electric wires, haunts

every enclosure, drinks at every pump, cowers at every grating, shudders upon every plot of grass, seeks rest in vain behind the legions of iron rails. In Paris, where nothing is wasted, costly and luxurious city though it be, but where wonderful human ants creep out of holes and pick up every scrap, there is no such thing. There, it blows nothing but dust. There, sharp eyes and sharp stomachs reap even the east wind, and get something out of it.

The wind sawed, and the sawdust whirled. The shrubs wrung their many heads, bemoaning that they had been over-persuaded by the sun to bud; the young leaves pined; the sparrows repented of their early marriages, like men and women; the colors of the rainbow were discernible, not in floral spring, but in the faces of the people whom it nibbled and pinched. And ever the wind sawed, and the sawdust whirled.

When the spring evenings are too long and light to shut out, and such weather is rife, the city which Mr. Podsnap so explanatorily called London, Londres, London, is at its worst. Such a black, shrill city, combining the qualities of a smoky house and a scolding wife; such a gritty city; such a hopeless city, with no rent in the leaden canopy of its sky; such a beleaguered city, invested by the great Marsh Forces of Essex and Kent. So the two old schoolfellows felt it to be, as, their dinner done, they turned towards the fire to smoke. Young Blight was gone, the coffee-house waiter was gone, the plates and dishes were gone, the wine was going — but not in the same direction.

"The wind sounds up here," quoth Eugene, stirring the fire, "as if we were keeping a lighthouse. I wish we were."

"Don't you think it would bore us?" Lightwood asked.

"Not more than any other place. And there would be no Circuit to go. But that's a selfish consideration, personal to me."

"And no clients to come," added Lightwood. "Not that that's a selfish consideration at all personal to *me*."

"If we were on an isolated rock in a stormy sea," said Eugene, smoking with his eyes on the fire, "Lady Tippins couldn't put off to visit us, or better still, might put off, and get swamped. People couldn't ask one to wedding breakfasts. There would be no Precedents to hammer at, except the plain-sailing Precedent of keeping the light up. It would be exciting to look out for wrecks."

"But otherwise," suggested Lightwood, "there might be a degree of sameness in the life."

"I have thought of that also," said Eugene, as if he really had been considering the subject in its various bearings with an eye to the business, "but it would be a defined and limited monotony. It would not extend beyond two people. Now, it's a question with me, Mortimer, whether a monotony defined with that precision, and limited to that extent, might not be more endurable than the unlimited monotony of one's fellow-creatures."

As Lightwood laughed and passed the wine, he remarked, "We shall have an opportunity, in our boating summer, of trying the question."

"An imperfect one," Eugene acquiesced with a sigh, "but so we shall. I hope we may not prove too much for one another."

"Now, regarding your respected father," said

Lightwood, bringing him to a subject they had expressly appointed to discuss: always the most slippery eel of eels of subjects to lay hold of.

"Yes, regarding my respected father," assented Eugene, settling himself in his arm-chair. "I would rather have approached my respected father by candle-light, as a theme requiring a little artificial brilliancy; but we will take him by twilight, enlivened with a glow of Wallsend."

He stirred the fire again as he spoke, and, having made it blaze, resumed, —

"My respected father has found, down in the parental neighborhood, a wife for his not-generally-respected son."

"With some money, of course?"

"With some money, of course, or he would not have found her. My respected father — let me shorten the dutiful tautology by substituting in future M. R. F., which sounds military, and rather like the Duke of Wellington."

"What an absurd fellow you are, Eugene!"

"Not at all, I assure you. M. R. F., having always in the clearest manner provided (as he calls it) for his children by pre-arranging from the hour of the birth of each, and sometimes from an earlier period, what the devoted little victim's calling and course in life should be, M. R. F. pre-arranged for myself that I was to be the barrister I am (with the slight addition of an enormous practice, which has not accrued), and also the married man I am not."

"The first you have often told me."

"The first I have often told you. Considering myself sufficiently incongruous on my legal eminence, I have until now suppressed my domestic

destiny. You know M. R. F., but not as well as I do. If you knew him as well as I do, he would amuse you."

"Filially spoken, Eugene!"

"Perfectly so, believe me; and with every sentiment of affectionate deference towards M. R. F. But, if he amuses me, I can't help it. When my eldest brother was born, of course the rest of us knew (I mean the rest of us would have known, if we had been in existence) that he was heir to the Family Embarrassments — we call it before company the Family Estate. But when my second brother was going to be born by and by, 'This,' says M. R. F., 'is a little pillar of the church.' *Was* born, and became a pillar of the church; a very shaky one. My third brother appeared, considerably in advance of his engagement to my mother; but M. R. F., not at all put out by surprise, instantly declared him a circumnavigator. Was pitchforked into the Navy, but has not circumnavigated. I announced myself, and was disposed of with the highly satisfactory results embodied before you. When my younger brother was half an hour old, it was settled by M. R. F. that he should have a mechanical genius. And so on. Therefore I say that M. R. F. amuses me."

"Touching the lady, Eugene."

"There M. R. F. ceases to be amusing, because my intentions are opposed to touching the lady."

"Do you know her?"

"Not in the least."

"Hadn't you better see her?"

"My dear Mortimer, you have studied my character. Could I possibly go down there, labelled

'ELIGIBLE. ON VIEW,' and meet the lady, similarly labelled? Anything to carry out M. R. F.'s arrangements, I am sure, with the greatest pleasure — except matrimony. Could I possibly support it? I, so soon bored, so constantly, so fatally?"

"But you are not a consistent fellow, Eugene."

"In susceptibility to boredom," returned that worthy, "I assure you I am the most consistent of mankind."

"Why, it was but now that you were dwelling on the advantages of a monotony of two."

"In a lighthouse. Do me the justice to remember the condition. In a lighthouse."

Mortimer laughed again, and Eugene, having laughed too for the first time, as if he found himself, on reflection, rather entertaining, relapsed into his usual gloom, and drowsily said, as he enjoyed his cigar, "No, there is no help for it; one of the prophetic deliveries of M. R. F. must forever remain unfulfilled. With every disposition to oblige him, he must submit to a failure."

It had grown darker as they talked, and the wind was sawing, and the sawdust was whirling outside paler windows. The underlying churchyard was already settling into deep dim shade, and the shade was creeping up to the housetops among which they sat. "As if," said Eugene, "as if the churchyard ghosts were rising."

He had walked to the window with his cigar in his mouth, to exalt its flavor by comparing the fireside with the outside, when he stopped midway on his return to his armchair, and said, —

"Apparently one of the ghosts has lost its way, and dropped in to be directed. Look at this phantom!"

Lightwood, whose back was towards the door, turned his head, and there, in the darkness of the entry, stood a something in the likeness of a man: to whom he addressed the not irrelevant inquiry, "Who the devil are you?"

"I ask your pardons, Governors," replied the ghost in a hoarse, double-barrelled whisper, "but might either on you be Lawyer Lightwood?"

"What do you mean by not knocking at the door?" demanded Mortimer.

"I ask your pardons, Governors," replied the ghost as before, "but probable you was not aware your door stood open."

"What do you want?"

Hereunto the ghost again hoarsely replied, in its double-barrelled manner, "I ask your pardons, Governors, but might one on you be Lawyer Lightwood?"

"One of us is," said the owner of that name.

"All right, Governors Both," returned the ghost, carefully closing the room-door; "'tickler business."

Mortimer lighted the candles. They showed the visitor to be an ill-looking visitor with a squinting leer, who, as he spoke, fumbled at an old sodden fur cap, formless and mangy, that looked like a furry animal, dog or cat, puppy or kitten, drowned and decaying.

"Now," said Mortimer, "what is it?"

"Governors Both," returned the man, in what he meant to be a wheedling tone, "which on you might be Lawyer Lightwood?"

"I am."

"Lawyer Lightwood," ducking at him with a servile air, "I am a man as gets my living, and as

seeks to get my living, by the sweat of my brow. Not to risk being done out of the sweat of my brow, by any chances, I should wish, afore going further, to be swore in."

"I am not a swearer in of people, man."

The visitor, clearly anything but reliant on this assurance, doggedly muttered, "Alfred David."

"Is that your name?" asked Lightwood.

"My name?" returned the man. "No: I want to take a Alfred David."

(Which Eugene, smoking and contemplating him, interpreted as meaning Affidavit.)

"I tell you, my good fellow," said Lightwood with his indolent laugh, "that I have nothing to do with swearing."

"He can swear *at* you," Eugene explained; "and so can I. But we can't do more for you."

Much discomfited by this information, the visitor turned the drowned dog or cat, puppy or kitten, about and about, and looked from one of the Governors Both to the other of the Governors Both, while he deeply considered within himself. At length he decided: —

"Then I must be took down."

"Where?" asked Lightwood.

"Here," said the man. "In pen and ink."

"First let us know what your business is about."

"It's about," said the man, taking a step forward, dropping his hoarse voice, and shading it with his hand, "it's about from five to ten thousand pound reward. That's what it's about. It's about murder. That's what it's about."

"Come nearer the table. Sit down. Will you have a glass of wine?"

"Yes, I will," said the man; "and I don't deceive you, Governors."

It was given him. Making a stiff arm to the elbow, he poured the wine into his mouth, tilted it into his right cheek, as saying, "What do you think of it?" tilted it into his left cheek, as saying, "What do *you* think of it?" jerked it into his stomach, as saying, "What do *you* think of it?" To conclude, smacked his lips, as if all three replied, "We think well of it."

"Will you have another?"

"Yes, I will," he repeated; "and I don't deceive you, Governors." And also repeated the other proceedings.

"Now," began Lightwood, "what's your name?"

"Why, there you're rather fast, Lawyer Lightwood," he replied in a remonstrant manner. "Don't you see, Lawyer Lightwood, there you're a little bit fast. I'm going to earn from five to ten thousand pound by the sweat of my brow; and, as a poor man doing justice to the sweat of my brow, is it likely I can afford to part with so much as my name without its being took down?"

Deferring to the man's sense of the binding powers of pen and ink and paper, Lightwood nodded acceptance of Eugene's nodded proposal to take those spells in hand. Eugene, bringing them to the table, sat down as clerk or notary.

"Now," said Lightwood, "what's your name?"

But further precaution was still due to the sweat of this honest fellow's brow.

"I should wish, Lawyer Lightwood," he stipulated, "to have that T'other Governor as my witness that what I said I said. Consequent, will the

T'other Governor be so good as chuck me his name, and where he lives?"

Eugene, cigar in mouth and pen in hand, tossed him his card. After spelling it out slowly, the man made it into a little roll, and tied it up in an end of his neckerchief still more slowly.

"Now," said Lightwood for the third time, "if you have quite completed your various preparations, my friend, and have fully ascertained that your spirits are cool, and not in any way hurried, what's your name?"

"Roger Riderhood."

"Dwelling-place?"

"Lime'us Hole."

"Calling or occupation?"

Not quite so glib with this answer as with the previous two, Mr. Riderhood gave in the definition: "Waterside character."

"Anything against you?" Eugene quietly put in as he wrote.

Rather balked, Mr. Riderhood evasively remarked, with an innocent air, that he believed the T'other Governor had asked him summat.

"Ever in trouble?" said Eugene.

"Once." (Might happen to any man, Mr. Riderhood added incidentally.)

"On suspicion of —?"

"Of seaman's pocket," said Mr. Riderhood. "Whereby I was in reality the man's best friend, and tried to take care of him."

"With the sweat of your brow?" asked Eugene.

"Till it poured down like rain," said Roger Riderhood.

Eugene leaned back in his chair, and smoked

with his eyes negligently turned on the informer, and his pen ready to reduce him to more writing. Lightwood also smoked, with his eyes negligently turned on the informer.

"Now let me be took down again," said Riderhood, when he had turned the drowned cap over and under, and had brushed it the wrong way (if it had a right way) with his sleeve. "I give information that the man that done the Harmon Murder is Gaffer Hexam, the man that found the body. The hand of Jesse Hexam, commonly called Gaffer on the river and alongshore, is the hand that done that deed. His hand and no other."

The two friends glanced at one another with more serious faces than they had shown yet.

"Tell us on what grounds you make this accusation," said Mortimer Lightwood.

"On the grounds," answered Riderhood, wiping his face with his sleeve, "that I was Gaffer's pardner, and suspected of him many a long day and many a dark night. On the grounds that I knowed his ways. On the grounds that I broke the pardnership because I see the danger; which I warn you his daughter may tell you another story about that, for anythink I can say, but you know what it'll be worth, for she'd tell you lies, the world round and the heavens broad, to save her father. On the grounds that it's well understood along the cause'ays and the stairs that he done it. On the grounds that he's fell off from, because he done it. On the grounds that I will swear he done it. On the grounds that you may take me where you will, and get me sworn to it. *I* don't want to back out of the consequences. I have made up *my* mind. Take me anywheres."

"All this is nothing," said Lightwood.

"Nothing?" repeated Riderhood, indignantly and amazedly.

"Merely nothing. It goes to no more than that you suspect this man of the crime. You may do so with some reason, or you may do so with no reason, but he cannot be convicted on your suspicion."

"Haven't I said — I appeal to the T'other Governor as my witness — haven't I said from the first minute that I opened my mouth in this here world-without-end-everlasting chair" (he evidently used that form of words as next in force to an affidavit), "that I was willing to swear that he done it? Haven't I said, Take me and get me sworn to it? Don't I say so now? You won't deny it, Lawyer Lightwood?"

"Surely not; but you only offer to swear to your suspicion, and I tell you it is not enough to swear to your suspicion."

"Not enough, ain't it, Lawyer Lightwood?" he cautiously demanded.

"Positively not."

"And did I say it *was* enough? Now, I appeal to the T'other Governor. Now, fair! Did I say so?"

"He certainly has not said that he had no more to tell," Eugene observed in a low voice, without looking at him, "whatever he seemed to imply."

"Hah!" cried the informer, triumphantly perceiving that the remark was generally in his favor, though apparently not closely understanding it. "Fort'nate for me I had a witness."

"Go on, then," said Lightwood. "Say out what you have to say. No afterthought."

"Let me be took down, then!" cried the informer eagerly and anxiously. "Let me be took down, for, by George and the Draggin, I'm a-coming to it now! Don't do nothing to keep back from an honest man the fruits of the sweat of his brow! I give information, then, that he told me that he done it. Is *that* enough?"

"Take care what you say, my friend," returned Mortimer.

"Lawyer Lightwood, take care, you, what I say; for I judge you will be answerable for follering it up!" Then, slowly and emphatically beating it all out with his open right hand on the palm of his left: "I, Roger Riderhood, Lime'us Hole, Waterside character, tell you, Lawyer Lightwood, that the man Jesse Hexam, commonly called upon the river and along shore Gaffer, told me that he done the deed. What's more, he told me with his own lips that he done the deed. What's more, he said that he done the deed. And I'll swear it!"

"Where did he tell you so?"

"Outside," replied Riderhood, always beating it out, with his head determinedly set askew, and his eyes watchfully dividing their attention between his two auditors, "outside the door of the Six Jolly Fellowships, towards a quarter arter twelve o'clock at midnight — but I will not in my conscience undertake to swear to so fine a matter as five minutes — on the night when he picked up the body. The Six Jolly Fellowships stands on the spot still. The Six Jolly Fellowships won't run away. If it turns out that he warn't at the Six Jolly Fellowships that night at midnight, I'm a liar."

"What did he say?"

"I'll tell you (take me down, T'other Governor, I ask no better). He come out first; I come out last. I might be a minute arter him; I might be half a minute, I might be a quarter of a minute; I cannot swear to that, and therefore I won't. That's knowing the obligations of a Alfred David, ain't it?"

"Go on."

"I found him a-waiting to speak to me. He says to me, 'Rogue Riderhood'—for that's the name I'm mostly called by—not for any meaning in it, for meaning it has none, but because of its being similar to Roger."

"Never mind that."

"'Scuse *me*, Lawyer Lightwood, it's a part of the truth, and as such I do mind it, and I must mind it, and I will mind it. 'Rogue Riderhood,' he says, 'words passed betwixt us on the river to-night.' Which they had; ask his daughter! 'I threatened you,' he says, 'to chop you over the fingers with my boat's stretcher, or take a aim at your brains with my boat-hook. I did so on accounts of your looking too hard at what I had in tow, as if you was suspicious, and on accounts of your holding on to the gunwale of my boat.' I says to him, 'Gaffer, I know it.' He says to me, 'Rogue Riderhood, you are a man in a dozen'—I think he said in a score, but of that I am not positive, so take the lowest figure, for precious be the obligations of a Alfred David. 'And,' he says, 'when your fellow-men is up, be it their lives or be it their watches, sharp is ever the word with you. Had you suspicions?' I says, 'Gaffer, I had; and what's more, I have.' He falls a-shaking, and he says, 'Of what?' I says, 'Of foul play.' He falls a-shaking worse, and

he says, 'There *was* foul play, then. I done it for his money. Don't betray me!' Those were the words as ever he used."

There was a silence, broken only by the fall of the ashes in the grate. An opportunity which the informer improved by smearing himself all over the head and neck and face with his drowned cap, and not at all improving his own appearance.

"What more?" asked Lightwood.

"Of him, d'ye mean, Lawyer Lightwood?"

"Of anything to the purpose."

"Now, I'm blest if I understand you, Governors Both," said the informer in a creeping manner, propitiating both, though only one had spoken. "What? Ain't *that* enough?"

"Did you ask him how he did it, where he did it, when he did it?"

"Far be it from me, Lawyer Lightwood! I was so troubled in my mind, that I wouldn't have knowed more, no, not for the sum as I expect to earn from you by the sweat of my brow, twice told! I had put an end to the pardnership. I had cut the connection. I couldn't undo what was done: and when he begs and prays, 'Old pardner, on my knees, don't split upon me!' I only makes answer, 'Never speak another word to Roger Riderhood, nor look him in the face!' and I shuns that man."

Having given these words a swing to make them mount the higher and go the further, Rogue Riderhood poured himself out another glass of wine unbidden, and seemed to chew it, as, with the half-emptied glass in his hand, he stared at the candles.

Mortimer glanced at Eugene, but Eugene sat glowering at his paper, and would give him no

responsive glance. Mortimer again turned to the informer, to whom he said, —

"You have been troubled in your mind a long time, man!"

Giving his wine a final chew, and swallowing it, the informer answered in a single word, —

"Hages!"

"When all that stir was made, when the Government reward was offered, when the police were on the alert, when the whole country rang with the crime!" said Mortimer impatiently.

"Hah!" Mr. Riderhood very slowly and hoarsely chimed in, with several retrospective nods of his head. "Warn't I troubled in my mind then!"

"When conjecture ran wild, when the most extravagant suspicions were afloat, when half a dozen innocent people might have been laid by the heels any hour in the day!" said Mortimer, almost warming.

"Hah!" Mr. Riderhood chimed in as before. "Warn't I troubled in my mind through it all!"

"But he hadn't," said Eugene, drawing a lady's head upon his writing-paper, and touching it at intervals, "the opportunity then of earning so much money, you see."

"The T'other Governor hits the nail, Lawyer Lightwood! It was that as turned me. I had many times and again struggled to relieve myself of the trouble on my mind, but I couldn't get it off. I had once very nigh got it off to Miss Abbey Potterson, which keeps the Six Jolly Fellowships — there is the 'ouse, it won't run away — there lives the lady, she ain't likely to be struck dead afore you get there — ask her! — but I couldn't do it. At

last, out comes the new bill with your own lawful name, Lawyer Lightwood, printed to it, and then I asks the question of my own intellects, Am I to have this trouble on my mind forever? Am I never to throw it off? Am I always to think more of Gaffer than of my own self? If he's got a daughter, ain't *I* got a daughter?"

"And echo answered — ?" Eugene suggested.

"You have," said Mr. Riderhood in a firm tone.

"Incidentally mentioning, at the same time, her age?" inquired Eugene.

"Yes, Governor. Two-and-twenty last October. And then I put it to myself, 'Regarding the money. It is a pot of money.' For it *is* a pot," said Mr. Riderhood with candor, "and why deny it?"

"Hear!" from Eugene as he touched his drawing.

"'It is a pot of money; but is it a sin for a laboring man that moistens every crust of bread he earns with his tears — or, if not with them, with the colds he catches in his head — is it a sin for that man to earn it? Say there is anything again earning it.' This I put to myself strong, as in duty bound. 'How can it be said without blaming Lawyer Lightwood for offering it to be earned?' And was it for *me* to blame Lawyer Lightwood? No!"

"No," said Eugene.

"Certainly not, Governor," Mr. Riderhood acquiesced. "So I made up my mind to get my trouble off my mind, and to earn by the sweat of my brow what was held out to me. And what's more," he added, suddenly turning bloodthirsty, "I mean to have it! And now I tell you, once and away, Lawyer Lightwood, that Jesse Hexam, com-

monly called Gaffer, his hand and no other, done the deed, on his own confession to me. And I give him up to you, and I want him took. This night!"

After another silence, broken only by the fall of the ashes in the grate, which attracted the informer's attention as if it were the chinking of money, Mortimer Lightwood leaned over his friend, and said in a whisper, —

"I suppose I must go with this fellow to our imperturbable friend at the police-station."

"I suppose," said Eugene, "there is no help for it."

"Do you believe him?"

"I believe him to be a thorough rascal. But he may tell the truth for his own purpose, and for this occasion only."

"It doesn't look like it."

"*He* doesn't," said Eugene. "But neither is his late partner, whom he denounces, a prepossessing person. The firm are cut-throat Shepherds both, in appearance. I should like to ask him one thing."

The subject of this conference sat leering at the ashes, trying with all his might to overhear what was said, but feigning abstraction as the "Governors Both" glanced at him.

"You mentioned (twice, I think) a daughter of this Hexam's," said Eugene aloud. "You don't mean to imply that she had any guilty knowledge of the crime?"

The honest man, after considering — perhaps considering how his answer might affect the fruits of the sweat of his brow — replied unreservedly, "No, I don't."

"And you implicate no other person?"

"It ain't what I implicate, it's what Gaffer implicated," was the dogged and determined answer. "I don't pretend to know more than that his words to me was, 'I done it.' Those was his words."

"I must see this out, Mortimer," whispered Eugene, rising. "How shall we go?"

"Let us walk," whispered Lightwood, "and give this fellow time to think of it."

Having exchanged the question and answer, they prepared themselves for going out, and Mr. Riderhood rose. While extinguishing the candles, Lightwood, quite as a matter of course, took up the glass from which that honest gentleman had drunk, and coolly tossed it under the grate, where it fell shivering into fragments.

"Now, if you will take the lead," said Lightwood, "Mr. Wrayburn and I will follow. You know where to go, I suppose?"

"I suppose I do, Lawyer Lightwood."

"Take the lead, then."

The waterside character pulled his drowned cap over his ears with both hands, and making himself more round-shouldered than nature had made him, by the sullen and persistent slouch with which he went, went down the stairs, round by the Temple Church, across the Temple into Whitefriars, and so on by the waterside streets.

"Look at his hangdog air," said Lightwood, following.

"It strikes me rather as a hang-*man* air," returned Eugene. "He has undeniable intentions that way."

They said little else as they followed. He went on before them as an ugly Fate might have done,

and they kept him in view, and would have been glad enough to lose sight of him. But on he went before them, always at the same distance, and the same rate. Aslant against the hard, implacable weather and the rough wind, he was no more to be driven back than hurried forward, but held on like an advancing Destiny. There came, when they were about midway on their journey, a heavy rush of hail, which in a few minutes pelted the streets clear, and whitened them. It made no difference to him. A man's life being to be taken, and the price of it got, the hailstones to arrest the purpose must lie larger and deeper than those. He crushed through them, leaving marks in the fast-melting slush that were mere shapeless holes; one might have fancied, following, that the very fashion of humanity had departed from his feet.

The blast went by, and the moon contended with the fast-flying clouds, and the wild disorder reigning up there made the pitiful little tumults in the streets of no account. It was not that the wind swept all the brawlers into places of shelter, as it had swept the hail still lingering in heaps wherever there was refuge for it; but that it seemed as if the streets were absorbed by the sky, and the night were all in the air.

"If he has had time to think of it," said Eugene, "he has not had time to think better of it — or differently of it, if that's better. There is no sign of drawing back in him; and, as I recollect this place, we must be close upon the corner where we alighted that night."

In fact, a few abrupt turns brought them to the riverside, where they had slipped about among

the stones, and where they now slipped more; the wind coming against them in slants and flaws, across the tide and the winding of the river, in a furious way. With that habit of getting under the lee of any shelter which waterside characters acquire, the waterside character at present in question led the way to the lee side of the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters before he spoke.

"Look round here, Lawyer Lightwood, at them red curtains. It's the Fellowships, the 'ouse as I told you wouldn't run away. And has it run away?"

Not showing himself much impressed by this remarkable confirmation of the informer's evidence, Lightwood inquired what other business they had there?

"I wished you to see the Fellowships for yourself, Lawyer Lightwood, that you might judge whether I'm a liar; and now I'll see Gaffer's window for myself, that we may know whether he's at home."

With that he crept away.

"He'll come back, I suppose?" murmured Lightwood.

"Ay! and go through with it," murmured Eugene.

He came back after a very short interval indeed.

"Gaffer's out, and his boat's out. His daughter's at home, sitting a-looking at the fire. But there's some supper getting ready, so Gaffer's expected. I can find what move he's upon, easy enough, presently."

Then he beckoned and led the way again, and they came to the police-station, still as clean and cool and steady as before, saving that the flame of

its lamp — being but a lamp-flame, and only attached to the Force as an outsider — flickered in the wind.

Also, within doors, Mr. Inspector was at his studies as of yore. He recognized the friends the instant they reappeared, but their reappearance had no effect upon his composure. Not even the circumstance that Riderhood was their conductor moved him, otherwise than that, as he took a dip of ink, he seemed, by a settlement of his chin in his stock, to propound to that personage, without looking at him, the question, "What have *you* been up to last?"

Mortimer Lightwood asked him, Would he be so good as look at these notes? handing him Eugene's.

Having read the first few lines, Mr. Inspector mounted to that (for him) extraordinary pitch of emotion, that he said, "Does either of you two gentlemen happen to have a pinch of snuff about him?" Finding that neither had, he did quite as well without it, and read on.

"Have you heard these read?" he then demanded of the honest man.

"No," said Riderhood.

"Then you had better hear them." And so read them aloud in an official manner.

"Are these notes correct, now, as to the information you bring here, and the evidence you mean to give?" he asked, when he had finished reading.

"They are. They are as correct," returned Mr. Riderhood, "as I am. I can't say more than that for 'em."

"I'll take this man myself, sir," said Mr. In-

spector to Lightwood. Then to Riderhood, "Is he at home? Where is he? What's he doing? You have made it your business to know all about it, no doubt."

Riderhood said what he did know, and promised to find out in a few minutes what he didn't know.

"Stop," said Mr. Inspector; "not till I tell you. We mustn't look like business. Would you two gentlemen object to making a pretence of taking a glass of something in my company at the Fellowships? Well-conducted house, and highly respectable landlady."

They replied that they would be glad to substitute a reality for the pretence, which, in the main, appeared to be as one with Mr. Inspector's meaning.

"Very good," said he, taking his hat from its peg, and putting a pair of handcuffs in his pocket as if they were his gloves. "Reserve!" Reserve saluted. "You know where to find me?" Reserve again saluted. "Riderhood, when you have found out concerning his coming home, come round to the window of Cosy, tap twice at it, and wait for me. Now, gentlemen."

As the three went out together, and Riderhood slouched off from under the trembling lamp his separate way, Lightwood asked the officer what he thought of this?

Mr. Inspector replied, with due generality and reticence, that it was always more likely that a man had done a bad thing than that he hadn't. That he himself had several times "reckoned up" Gaffer, but had never been able to bring him to a satisfactory criminal total. That, if this story was true, it was only in part true. That the two men, very

shy characters, would have been jointly and pretty equally "in it;" but that this man had "spotted" the other, to save himself and get the money.

"And I think," added Mr. Inspector in conclusion, "that if all goes well with him, he's in a tolerable way of getting it. But as this is the Fellowships, gentlemen, where the lights are, I recommend dropping the subject. You can't do better than be interested in some lime-works anywhere down about Northfleet, and doubtful whether some of your lime don't get into bad company as it comes up in barges."

"You hear, Eugene?" said Lightwood over his shoulder. "You are deeply interested in lime."

"Without lime," returned that unmoved barrister-at-law, "my existence would be unilluminated by a ray of hope.".

CHAPTER XIII.

TRACKING THE BIRD OF PREY.

THE two lime merchants, with their escort, entered the dominions of Miss Abbey Potterson, to whom their escort (presenting them and their pretended business over the half-door of the bar in a confidential way) preferred his figurative request that "a mouthful of fire" might be lighted in Cosy. Always well disposed to assist the constituted authorities, Miss Abbey bade Bob Gliddery attend the gentlemen to that retreat, and promptly enliven it with fire and gaslight. Of this commission the bare-armed Bob, leading the way with a flaming wisp of paper, so speedily acquitted himself, that Cosy seemed to leap out of a dark sleep, and embrace them warmly, the moment they passed the lintels of its hospitable door.

"They burn sherry very well here," said Mr. Inspector, as a piece of local intelligence. "Perhaps you gentlemen might like a bottle?"

The answer being, By all means, Bob Gliddery received his instructions from Mr. Inspector, and departed in a becoming state of alacrity, engendered by reverence for the majesty of the law.

"It's a certain fact," said Mr. Inspector, "that

this man we have received our information from," indicating Riderhood with his thumb over his shoulder, "has for some time past given the other man a bad name arising out of your lime barges, and that the other man has been avoided in consequence. I don't say what it means or proves, but it's a certain fact. I had it first from one of the opposite sex of my acquaintance," vaguely indicating Miss Abbey with his thumb over his shoulder, "down away at a distance, over yonder."

Then probably Mr. Inspector was not quite unprepared for their visit that evening? Lightwood hinted.

"Well, you see," said Mr. Inspector, "it was a question of making a move. It's of no use moving if you don't know what your move is. You had better by far keep still. In the matter of this lime, I certainly had an idea that it might lie betwixt the two men; I always had that idea. Still, I was forced to wait for a start, and I wasn't so lucky as to get a start. This man that we have received our information from has got a start, and, if he don't meet with a check, he may make the running, and come in first. There may turn out to be something considerable for him that comes in second, and I don't mention who may or who may not try for that place. There's duty to do, and I shall do it, under any circumstances. to the best of my judgment and ability."

"Speaking as a shipper of lime" — began Eugene.

"Which no man has a better right to do than yourself, you know," said Mr. Inspector.

"I hope not," said Eugene; "my father having

been a shipper of lime before me, and my grandfather before him — in fact, we having been a family immersed to the crowns of our heads in lime during several generations — I beg to observe that, if this missing lime could be got hold of without any young female relative of any distinguished gentleman engaged in the lime trade (which I cherish next to my life) being present, I think it might be a more agreeable proceeding to the assisting bystanders, that is to say, lime-burners."

"I also," said Lightwood, pushing his friend aside with a laugh, "should much prefer that."

"It shall be done, gentlemen, if it can be done conveniently," said Mr. Inspector with coolness. "There is no wish on my part to cause any distress in that quarter. Indeed, I am sorry for that quarter."

"There was a boy in that quarter," remarked Eugene. "He is still there?"

"No," said Mr. Inspector. "He has quitted those works. He is otherwise disposed of."

"Will she be left alone, then?" asked Eugene.

"She will be left," said Mr. Inspector, "alone."

Bob's reappearance with a steaming jug broke off the conversation. But, although the jug steamed forth a delicious perfume, its contents had not received that last happy touch which the surpassing finish of the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters imparted on such momentous occasions. Bob carried in his left hand one of those iron models of sugar-loaf hats before mentioned, into which he emptied the jug, and the pointed end of which he thrust deep down into the fire, so leaving it for a few moments while he disappeared and reappeared with three bright

drinking-glasses. Placing these on the table and bending over the fire, meritoriously sensible of the trying nature of his duty, he watched the wreaths of steam, until, at the special instant of projection, he caught up the iron vessel and gave it one delicate twirl, causing it to send forth one gentle hiss. Then he restored the contents to the jug; held over the steam of the jug each of the three bright glasses in succession; finally filled them all, and with a clear conscience awaited the applause of his fellow-creatures.

It was bestowed (Mr. Inspector having proposed, as an appropriate sentiment, "The lime trade!"), and Bob withdrew to report the commendations of the guests to Miss Abbey in the bar. It may be here in confidence admitted that, the room being close shut in his absence, there had not appeared to be the slightest reason for the elaborate maintenance of this same lime fiction. Only it had been regarded by Mr. Inspector as so uncommonly satisfactory, and so fraught with mysterious virtues, that neither of his clients had presumed to question it.

Two taps were now heard on the outside of the window. Mr. Inspector, hastily fortifying himself with another glass, strolled out with a noiseless foot and an unoccupied countenance. As one might go to survey the weather and the general aspect of the heavenly bodies.

"This is becoming grim, Mortimer," said Eugene in a low voice. "I don't like this."

"Nor I," said Lightwood. "Shall we go?"

"Being here, let us stay. You ought to see it out, and I won't leave you. Besides, that lonely girl with the dark hair runs in my head. It was

mendation, but they wanted to know where they could join the watchers when so disposed. Rather than trust to a verbal description of the place, which might mislead, Eugene (with a less weighty sense of personal trouble on him than he usually had) would go out with Mr. Inspector, note the spot, and come back.

On the shelving bank of the river, among the slimy stones of a causeway — not the especial causeway of the Six Jolly Fellowships, which had a landing-place of its own, but another, a little removed, and very near to the old windmill which was the denounced man's dwelling-place — were a few boats; some moored and already beginning to float; others hauled up above the reach of the tide. Under one of these latter Eugene's companion disappeared. And when Eugene had observed its position with reference to the other boats, and had made sure that he could not miss it, he turned his eyes upon the building where, as he had been told, the lonely girl with the dark hair sat by the fire.

He could see the light of the fire shining through the window. Perhaps it drew him on to look in. Perhaps he had come out with the express intention. That part of the bank having rank grass growing on it, there was no difficulty in getting close, without any noise of footsteps: it was but to scramble up a ragged face of pretty hard mud, some three or four feet high, and come upon the grass and to the window. He came to the window by that means.

She had no other light than the light of the fire. The unkindled lamp stood on the table. She sat on the ground, looking at the brazier, with her face

leaning on her hand. There was a kind of film or flicker on her face, which at first he took to be the fitful firelight; but, on a second look, he saw that she was weeping. A sad and solitary spectacle, as shown him by the rising and the falling of the fire.

It was a little window of but four pieces of glass, and was not curtained; he chose it because the larger window near it was. It showed him the room, and the bills upon the wall respecting the drowned people starting out and receding by turns. But he glanced slightly at them, though he looked long and steadily at her. A deep rich piece of color, with the brown flush of her cheek and the shining lustre of her hair, though sad and solitary, weeping by the rising and the falling of the fire.

She started up. He had been so very still, that he felt sure it was not he who had disturbed her, so merely withdrew from the window, and stood near it in the shadow of the wall. She opened the door, and said in an alarmed tone, "Father, was that you calling me?" And again, "Father!" And once again, after listening, "Father! I thought I heard you call me twice before!"

No response. As she re-entered at the door, he dropped over the bank, and made his way back, among the ooze and near the hiding-place, to Mortimer Lightwood: to whom he told what he had seen of the girl, and how this was becoming very grim indeed.

"If the real man feels as guilty as I do," said Eugene, "he is remarkably uncomfortable."

"Influence of secrecy," suggested Lightwood.

"I am not at all obliged to it for making me Guy Fawkes in the vault and a Sneak in the area

both at once," said Eugene. "Give me some more of that stuff."

Lightwood helped him to some more of that stuff, but it had been cooling, and didn't answer now.

"Pooh!" said Eugene, spitting it out among the ashes. "Tastes like the wash of the river."

"Are you so familiar with the flavor of the wash of the river?"

"I seem to be to-night. I feel as if I had been half drowned, and swallowing a gallon of it."

"Influence of locality," suggested Lightwood.

"You are mighty learned to-night, you and your influences," returned Eugene. "How long shall we stay here?"

"How long do you think?"

"If I could choose, I should say a minute," replied Eugene, "for the Jolly Fellowship Porters are not the jolliest dogs I have known. But I suppose we are best here until they turn us out, with the other suspicious characters, at midnight."

Thereupon he stirred the fire, and sat down on one side of it. It struck eleven, and he made believe to compose himself patiently. But gradually he took the fidgets in one leg, and then in the other leg, and then in one arm, and then in the other arm, and then in his chin, and then in his back, and then in his forehead, and then in his hair, and then in his nose; and then he stretched himself recumbent on two chairs and groaned; and then he started up.

"Invisible insects of diabolical activity swarm in this place. I am tickled and twitched all over. Mentally, I have now committed a burglary under the meanest circumstances, and the myrmidons of justice are at my heels."

"I am quite as bad," said Lightwood, sitting up facing him, with a tumbled head, after going through some wonderful evolutions, in which his head had been the lowest part of him. "This restlessness began with me long ago. All the time you were out I felt like Gulliver with the Lilliputians firing upon him."

"It won't do, Mortimer. We must get into the air: we must join our dear friend and brother, Riderhood. And let us tranquillize ourselves by making a compact. Next time (with a view to our peace of mind) we'll commit the crime instead of taking the criminal. You swear it?"

"Certainly."

"Sworn! Let Tippins look to it. Her life's in danger."

Mortimer rang the bell to pay the score, and Bob appeared to transact that business with him: whom Eugene, in his careless extravagance, asked if he would like a situation in the lime trade.

"Thankee, sir, no sir," said Bob: "I've a good sitiwation here, sir."

"If you change your mind at any time," returned Eugene, "come to me at my works, and you'll always find an opening in the lime-kiln."

"Thankee, sir," said Bob.

"This is my partner," said Eugene, "who keeps the books and attends to the wages. A fair day's wages for a fair day's work is ever my partner's motto."

"And a very good 'un it is, gentlemen," said Bob, receiving his fee, and drawing a bow out of his head with his right hand, very much as he would have drawn a pint of beer out of the beer engine.

"Eugene," Mortimer apostrophized him, laughing quite heartily when they were alone again, "how *can* you be so ridiculous?"

"I am in a ridiculous humor," quoth Eugene; "I am a ridiculous fellow. Everything is ridiculous. Come along!"

It passed into Mortimer Lightwood's mind that a change of some sort, best expressed, perhaps, as an intensification of all that was wildest and most negligent and reckless in his friend, had come upon him in the last half-hour or so. Thoroughly used to him as he was, he found something new and strained in him that was for the moment perplexing. This passed into his mind, and passed out again; but he remembered it afterwards.

"There's where she sits, you see," said Eugene, when they were standing under the bank, roared and riven at by the wind. "There's the light of her fire."

"I'll take a peep through the window," said Mortimer.

"No, don't!" Eugene caught him by the arm. "Best not make a show of her. Come to our honest friend."

He led him to the post of watch, and they both dropped down and crept under the lee of the boat; a better shelter than it had seemed before, being directly contrasted with the blowing wind and the bare night.

"Mr. Inspector at home?" whispered Eugene.

"Here I am, sir."

"And our friend of the perspiring brow is at the far corner there? Good. Anything happened?"

"His daughter has been out, thinking she heard

him calling, unless it was a sign to him to keep out of the way. It might have been."

"It might have been Rule Britannia," muttered Eugene, "but it wasn't. Mortimer!"

"Here!" (On the other side of Mr. Inspector.)

"Two burglaries now and a forgery!"

With this indication of his depressed state of mind, Eugene fell silent.

They were all silent for a long while. As it got to be flood tide, and the water came nearer to them, noises on the river became more frequent, and they listened more. To the turning of steam-paddles, to the clinking of iron chain, to the creaking of blocks, to the measured working of oars, to the occasional violent barking of some passing dog on shipboard, who seemed to scent them lying in their hiding-place. The night was not so dark but that, besides the lights at bows and mastheads gliding to and fro, they could discern some shadowy bulk attached; and now and then a ghostly lighter with a large dark sail, like a warning arm, would start up very near them, pass on, and vanish. At this time of their watch the water close to them would be often agitated by some impulsion given to it from a distance. Often they believed this beat and plash to be the boat they lay in wait for, running in ashore; and again and again they would have started up, but for the immobility with which the informer, well used to the river, kept quiet in his place.

The wind carried away the striking of the great multitude of City church clocks, for those lay to leeward of them: but there were bells to windward that told them of its being One — Two — Three. Without that aid they would have known how the

night wore, by the falling of the tide, recorded in the appearance of an ever-widening black wet strip of shore, and the emergence of the paved causeway from the river, foot by foot.

As the time so passed, this slinking business became a more and more precarious one. It would seem as if the man had had some intimation of what was in hand against him, or had taken fright. His movements might have been planned to gain for him, in getting beyond their reach, twelve hours' advantage. The honest man who had expended the sweat of his brow became uneasy, and began to complain with bitterness of the proneness of mankind to cheat him — him invested with the dignity of Labor!

Their retreat was so chosen that while they could watch the river, they could watch the house. No one had passed in or out since the daughter thought she heard the father calling. No one could pass in or out without being seen.

"But it will be light at five," said Mr. Inspector, "and then *we* shall be seen."

"Look here," said Riderhood, "what do you say to this? He may have been lurking in and out, and just holding his own betwixt two or three bridges, for hours back."

"What do you make of that?" said Mr. Inspector. Stoical, but contradictory.

"He may be doing so at this present time."

"What do you make of *that?*" said Mr. Inspector.

"My boat's among them boats here at the cause'ay."

"And what do you make of your boat?" said Mr. Inspector.

"What if I put off in her, and take a look round? I know his ways, and the likely nooks he favors. I know where he'd be at such a time of the tide, and where he'd be at such another time. Ain't I been his pardner? None of you need show. None of you need stir. I can shove her off without help; and as to me being seen, I'm about at all times."

"You might have given a worse opinion," said Mr. Inspector after brief consideration. "Try it."

"Stop a bit. Let's work it out. If I want you I'll drop round under the Fellowships, and tip you a whistle."

"If I might so far presume as to offer a suggestion to my honorable and gallant friend, whose knowledge of naval matters far be it from me to impeach," Eugene struck in with great deliberation, "it would be, that to tip a whistle is to advertise mystery and invite speculation. My honorable and gallant friend will, I trust, excuse me, as an independent member, for throwing out a remark which I feel to be due to this house and the country."

"Was that the T'other Governor, or Lawyer Lightwood?" asked Riderhood. For they spoke as they crouched or lay, without seeing one another's faces.

"In reply to the question put by my honorable and gallant friend," said Eugene, who was lying on his back with his hat on his face, as an attitude highly expressive of watchfulness, "I can have no hesitation in replying (it not being inconsistent with the public service) that those accents were the accents of the T'other Governor."

"You have tolerable good eyes, ain't you, Gov-

ernor? You've all tolerable good eyes, ain't you?" demanded the informer.

All.

"Then, if I row up under the Fellowships and lay there, no need to whistle. You'll make out that there's a speck of something or another there, and you'll know it's me, and you'll come down that cause'ay to me. Understood all?"

Understood all.

"Off she goes, then!"

In a moment, with the wind cutting keenly at him sideways, he was staggering down to his boat; in a few moments he was clear, and creeping up the river under their own shore.

Eugene had raised himself on his elbow to look into the darkness after him. "I wish the boat of my honorable and gallant friend," he murmured, lying down again and speaking into his hat, "may be endowed with philanthropy enough to turn bottom upward and extinguish him! — Mortimer."

"My honorable friend."

"Three burglaries, two forgeries, and a midnight assassination."

Yet, in spite of having those weights on his conscience, Eugene was somewhat enlivened by the late slight change in the circumstances of affairs. So were his two companions. Its being a change was everything. The suspense seemed to have taken a new lease, and to have begun afresh from a recent date. There was something additional to look for. They were all three more sharply on the alert, and less deadened by the miserable influences of the place and time.

More than an hour had passed, and they were even

dozing, when one of the three — each said it was he, and he had *not* dozed — made out Riderhood in his boat at the spot agreed on. They sprang up, came out from their shelter, and went down to him. When he saw them coming he dropped alongside the causeway; so that they, standing on the causeway, could speak with him in whispers, under the shadowy mass of the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters fast asleep.

"Blest if I can make it out!" said he, staring at them.

"Make what out? Have you seen him?"

"No."

"What *have* you seen?" asked Lightwood. For he was staring at them in the strangest way.

"I've seen his boat."

"Not empty?"

"Yes, empty. And what's more, — adrift. And what's more, — with one scull gone. And what's more, — with t'other scull jammed in the thowels, and broke short off. And what's more, — the boat drove tight by the tide, atwixt two tiers of barges. And what's more, — he's in luck again, by George if he ain't!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BIRD OF PREY BROUGHT DOWN.

Cold on the shore, in the raw cold of that leaden crisis in the four-and-twenty hours when the vital force of all the noblest and prettiest things that live is at its lowest, the three watchers looked each at the blank faces of the other two, and all at the blank face of Riderhood in his boat.

"Gaffer's boat, Gaffer in luck again, and yet no Gaffer!" So spake Riderhood, staring disconsolate.

As if with one accord, they all turned their eyes towards the light of the fire shining through the window. It was fainter and duller. Perhaps fire, like the higher animal and vegetable life it helps to sustain, has its greatest tendency towards death when the night is dying, and the day is not yet born.

"If it was me that had the law of this here job in hand," growled Riderhood, with a threatening shake of his head, "blest if I wouldn't lay hold of *her*, at any rate!"

"Ay, but it is not you," said Eugene, with something so suddenly fierce in him that the informer returned submissively: "Well, well, well, T'other Governor, I didn't say it was. A man may speak."

"And vermin may be silent," said Eugene. "Hold your tongue, you water-rat!"

Astonished by his friend's unusual heat, Lightwood stared too, and then said: "What can have become of this man?"

"Can't imagine. Unless he dived overboard." The informer wiped his brow ruefully as he said it, sitting in his boat, and always staring disconsolate.

"Did you make his boat fast?"

"She's fast enough till the tide runs back. I couldn't make her faster than she is. Come aboard of mine, and see for your own selves."

There was a little backwardness in complying, for the freight looked too much for the boat; but, on Riderhood's protesting "that he had had half a dozen, dead and alive, in her afore now, and she was nothing deep in the water nor down in the stern, even then, to speak of," they carefully took their places, and trimmed the crazy thing. While they were doing so, Riderhood still sat staring disconsolate.

"All right. Give way!" said Lightwood.

"Give way, by George!" repeated Riderhood before shoving off. "If he's gone and made off anyhow, Lawyer Lightwood, it's enough to make me give way in a different manner. But he always was a cheat, con-found him! He always was a infernal cheat, was Gaffer. Nothing straightfor'ard, nothing on the square. So mean, so underhanded. Never going through with a thing, nor carrying it out like a man!"

"Hallo! Steady!" cried Eugene (he had recovered immediately on embarking), as they bumped heavily against a pile; and then in a lower voice reversed his late apostrophe by remarking ("I wish the boat of my honorable and gallant friend may be

endowed with philanthropy enough *not* to turn bottom upward and extinguish us!) Steady, steady! Sit close, Mortimer. Here's the hail again. See how it flies, like a troop of wild cats, at Mr. Riderhood's eyes!"

Indeed, he had the full benefit of it, and it so mauled him, though he bent his head low, and tried to present nothing but the mangy cap to it, that he dropped under the lee of a tier of shipping, and they lay there until it was over. The squall had come up, like a spiteful messenger before the morning; there followed in its wake a ragged tier of light, which ripped the dark clouds until they showed a great gray hole of day.

They were all shivering, and everything about them seemed to be shivering; the river itself, craft, rigging, sails, such early smoke as there yet was on the shore. Black with wet, and altered to the eye by white patches of hail and sleet, the huddled buildings looked lower than usual, as if they were cowering, and had shrunk with the cold. Very little life was to be seen on either bank, windows and doors were shut, and the staring black and white letters upon wharves and warehouses "looked," said Eugene to Mortimer, "like inscriptions over the graves of dead businesses."

As they glided slowly on, keeping under the shore, and sneaking in and out among the shipping by back-alleys of water, in a pilfering way that seemed to be their boatman's normal manner of progression, all the objects among which they crept were so huge, in contrast with their wretched boat, as to threaten to crush it. Not a ship's hull, with its rusty iron links of cable run out of hawse-holes long discolored

with the iron's rusty tears, but seemed to be there with a fell intention. Not a figure-head but had the menacing look of bursting forward to run them down. Not a sluice-gate, or a painted scale upon a post or wall, showing the depth of water, but seemed to hint, like the dreadfully facetious Wolf in bed in Grandmamma's cottage, "That's to drown *you* in, my dears!" Not a lumbering black barge, with its cracked and blistered side impending over them, but seemed to suck at the river with a thirst for sucking them under. And everything so vaunted the spoiling influences of water—discolored copper, rotten wood, honeycombed stone, green dank deposit—that the after-consequences of being crushed, sucked under, and drawn down, looked as ugly to the imagination as the main event.

Some half-hour of this work, and Riderhood unshipped his sculls, stood holding on to a barge, and hand over hand longwise along the barge's side gradually worked his boat under her head into a secret little nook of scummy water. And driven into that nook, and wedged as he had described, was Gaffer's boat; that boat with the stain still in it, bearing some resemblance to a muffled human form.

"Now tell me I'm a liar!" said the honest man.

("With a morbid expectation," murmured Eugene to Lightwood, "that somebody is always going to tell him the truth.")

"This is Hexam's boat," said Mr. Inspector. "I know her well."

"Look at the broken scull. Look at the t'other scull gone. *Now* tell me I am a liar!" said the honest man.

Mr. Inspector stepped into the boat. Eugene and Mortimer looked on.

"And see now!" added Riderhood, creeping aft, and showing a stretched rope made fast there, and towing overboard. "Didn't I tell you he was in luck again?"

"Haul in," said Mr. Inspector.

"Easy to say haul in," answered Riderhood. "Not so easy done. His luck's got fouled under the keels of the barges. I tried to haul in last time, but I couldn't. See how taut the line is!"

"I must have it up," said Mr. Inspector. "I am going to take this boat ashore, and his luck along with it. Try easy, now."

He tried easy, now: but the luck resisted; wouldn't come.

"I mean to have it, and the boat too," said Mr. Inspector, playing the line.

But still the luck resisted; wouldn't come.

"Take care," said Riderhood. "You'll disfigure. Or pull asunder, perhaps."

"I am not going to do either, not even to your Grandmother," said Mr. Inspector; "but I mean to have it. Come!" he added, at once persuasively and with authority to the hidden object in the water, as he played the line again; "it's no good this sort of game, you know. You *must* come up. I mean to have you."

There was so much virtue in this distinctly and decidedly meaning to have it, that it yielded a little, even while the line was played.

"I told you so," quoth Mr. Inspector, pulling off his outer coat, and leaning well over the stern with a will. "Come!"

It was an awful sort of fishing, but it no more disconcerted Mr. Inspector than if he had been fishing in a punt on a summer evening by some soothing weir high up the peaceful river. After certain minutes, and a few directions to the rest to "ease her a little for'ard," and "now ease her a trifle aft," and the like, he said composedly, "All clear!" and the line and the boat came free together.

Accepting Lightwood's proffered hand to help him up, he then put on his coat, and said to Riderhood, "Hand me over those spare sculls of yours, and I'll pull this in to the nearest stairs. Go ahead, you, and keep out in pretty open water, that I mayn't get fouled again."

His directions were obeyed, and they pulled ashore directly; two in one boat, two in the other.

"Now," said Mr. Inspector, again to Riderhood, when they were all on the slushy stones; "you have had more practice in this than I have had, and ought to be a better workman at it. Undo the tow-rope, and we'll help you haul in."

Riderhood got into the boat accordingly. It appeared as if he had scarcely had a moment's time to touch the rope or look over the stern, when he came scrambling back, as pale as the morning, and gasped out: —

"By the Lord, he's done me!"

"What do you mean?" they all demanded.

He pointed behind him at the boat, and gasped to that degree that he dropped upon the stones to get his breath.

"Gaffer's done me. It's Gaffer!"

They ran to the rope, leaving him gasping there. Soon, the form of the bird of prey, dead some hours,

lay stretched upon the shore, with a new blast storming at it, and clotting the wet hair with hailstones.

Father, was that you calling me? Father! I thought I heard you call me twice before! Words never to be answered, those, upon the earth side of the grave. The wind sweeps jeeringly over Father, whips him with the frayed ends of his dress and his jagged hair, tries to turn him where he lies stark on his back, and force his face towards the rising sun, that he may be shamed the more. A lull, and the wind is secret and prying with him; lifts and lets fall a rag; hides palpitating under another rag; runs nimbly through his hair and beard. Then, in a rush, it cruelly taunts him. Father, was that you calling me? Was it you, the voiceless and the dead? Was it you, thus buffeted as you lie here in a heap? Was it you, thus baptized unto Death, with these flying impurities now flung upon your face? Why not speak, Father? Soaking into this filthy ground, as you lie here, is your own shape. Did you never see such a shape soaked into your boat? Speak, Father. Speak to us, the winds, the only listeners left you!

"Now, see," said Mr. Inspector after mature deliberation: kneeling on one knee beside the body, when they had stood looking down on the drowned man, as he had many a time looked down on many another man: "the way of it was this. Of course you gentlemen hardly failed to observe that he was towing by the neck and arms."

They had helped to release the rope, and of course not.

"And you will have observed before, and you will observe now, that this knot, which was drawn chock-

tight round his neck by the strain of his own arms, is a slip-knot;" holding it up for demonstration.

Plain enough.

"Likewise you will have observed how he had run the other end of this rope to his boat."

It had the curves and indentations in it still, where it had been twined and bound.

"Now, see," said Mr. Inspector, "see how it works round upon him. It's a wild, tempestuous evening when this man that was," stooping to wipe some hailstones out of his hair with an end of his own drowned jacket, — "there! Now he's more like himself, though he's badly bruised, — when this man that was, rows out upon the river on his usual lay. He carries with him this coil of rope. He always carries with him this coil of rope. It's as well known to me as he was himself. Sometimes it lay in the bottom of his boat. Sometimes he hung it loose round his neck. He was a light dresser, was this man; — you see?" lifting the loose neckerchief over his breast, and taking the opportunity of wiping the dead lips with it, — "and when it was wet, or freezing, or blew cold, he would hang this coil of line round his neck. Last evening he does this. Worse for him! He dodges about in his boat, does this man, till he gets chilled. His hands," taking up one of them, which dropped like a leaden weight, "get numbed. He sees some object, that's in his way of business, floating. He makes ready to secure that object. He unwinds the end of his coil that he wants to take some turns on in his boat, and he takes turns enough on it to secure that it shan't run out. He makes it too secure, as it happens. He is a little longer about this than usual,

his hands being numbed. His object drifts up before he is quite ready for it. He catches at it, thinks he'll make sure of the contents of the pockets anyhow, in case he should be parted from it, bends right over the stern, and in one of these heavy squalls, or in the cross-swell of two steamers, or in not being quite prepared, or through all, or most, or some, gets a lurch, overbalances, and goes head foremost overboard. Now, see! He can swim, can this man, and instantly he strikes out. But in such striking out he tangles his arms, pulls strong on the slip-knot, and it runs home. The object he had expected to take in tow floats by, and his own boat tows him dead, to where we found him, all entangled in his own line. You'll ask me how I make out about the pockets? First, I'll tell you more; there was silver in 'em. How do I make that out? Simple and satisfactory. Because he's got it here." The lecturer held up the tightly-clenched right hand.

"What is to be done with the remains?" asked Lightwood.

"If you wouldn't object to standing by him half a minute, sir," was the reply, "I'll find the nearest of our men to come and take charge of him;—I still call it *him*, you see," said Mr. Inspector, looking back as he went, with a philosophical smile upon the force of habit.

"Eugene," said Lightwood—and was about to add, "we may wait at a little distance," when, turning his head, he found that no Eugene was there. He raised his voice and called "Eugene! Holloa!" But no Eugene replied.

It was broad daylight now, and he looked about. But no Eugene was in all the view.

Mr. Inspector speedily returning down the wooden stairs, with a police-constable, Lightwood asked him if he had seen his friend leave them? Mr. Inspector could not exactly say that he had seen him go, but had noticed that he was restless.

"Singular and entertaining combination, sir, your friend."

"I wish it had not been a part of his singular and entertaining combination to give me the slip under these dreary circumstances at this time of the morning," said Lightwood. "Can we get anything hot to drink?"

We could, and we did. In a public-house kitchen with a large fire. We got hot brandy-and-water, and it revived us wonderfully. Mr. Inspector having to Mr. Riderhood announced his official intention of "keeping his eye upon him," stood him in a corner of the fireplace like a wet umbrella, and took no further outward and visible notice of that honest man, except ordering a separate service of brandy-and-water for him, apparently out of the public funds.

As Mortimer Lightwood sat before the blazing fire, conscious of drinking brandy-and-water then and there in his sleep, and yet at one and the same time drinking burnt sherry at the Six Jolly Fellowships, and lying under the boat on the river shore, and sitting in the boat that Riderhood rowed, and listening to the lecture recently concluded, and having to dine in the Temple with an unknown man, who described himself as M. R. F. Eugene Gaffer Harmon, and said he lived at Hail-storm, — as he passed through these curious vicissitudes of fatigue and slumber, arranged upon the scale of a dozen

hours to the second, he became aware of answering aloud a communication of pressing importance that had never been made to him, and then turned it into a cough on beholding Mr. Inspector. For he felt, with some natural indignation, that that functionary might otherwise suspect him of having closed his eyes, or wandered in his attention.

"Here just before us, you see," said Mr. Inspector.

"*I* see," said Lightwood with dignity.

"And had hot brandy-and-water too, you see," said Mr. Inspector, "and then cut off at a great rate."

"Who?" said Lightwood.

"Your friend, you know."

"*I* know," he replied, again with dignity.

After hearing, in a mist through which Mr. Inspector loomed vague and large, that the officer took upon himself to prepare the dead man's daughter for what had befallen in the night, and generally that he took everything upon himself, Mortimer Lightwood stumbled in his sleep to a cab-stand, called a cab, and had entered the army, and committed a capital military offence, and been tried by court-martial and found guilty, and had arranged his affairs and been marched out to be shot, before the door banged.

Hard work rowing the cab through the City to the Temple, for a cup of from five to ten thousand pounds value, given by Mr. Boffin; and hard work holding forth at that immeasurable length to Eugene (when he had been rescued with a rope from the running pavement) for making off in that extraordinary manner! But he offered such ample

apologies, and was so very penitent, that, when Lightwood got out of the cab, he gave the driver a particular charge to be careful of him. Which the driver (knowing there was no other fare left inside) stared at prodigiously.

In short, the night's work had so exhausted and worn out this actor in it, that he had become a mere somnambulist. He was too tired to rest in his sleep, until he was even tired out of being too tired, and dropped into oblivion. Late in the afternoon he awoke, and in some anxiety sent round to Eugene's lodging hard by, to inquire if he were up yet?

Oh yes, he was up! In fact, he had not been to bed. He had just come home. And here he was, close following on the heels of the message.

"Why, what bloodshot, draggled, dishevelled spectacle is this?" cried Mortimer.

"Are my feathers so very much rumpled?" said Eugene, coolly going up to the looking-glass. "They *are* rather out of sorts. But consider. Such a night for plumage!"

"Such a night?" repeated Mortimer. "What became of you in the morning?"

"My dear fellow," said Eugene, sitting on his bed, "I felt that we had bored one another so long, that an unbroken continuance of those relations must inevitably terminate in our flying to opposite points of the earth. I also felt that I had committed every crime in the Newgate Calendar. So, for mingled considerations of friendship and felony, I took a walk."

CHAPTER XV.

TWO NEW SERVANTS.

Mr. and Mrs. Boffin sat after breakfast, in the Bower, a prey to prosperity. Mr. Boffin's face denoted Care and Complication. Many disordered papers were before him, and he looked at them about as hopefully as an innocent civilian might look at a crowd of troops whom he was required at five minutes' notice to manœuvre and review. He had been engaged in some attempts to make notes of these papers; but being troubled (as men of his stamp often are) with an exceedingly distrustful and corrective thumb, that busy member had so often interposed to smear his notes, that they were little more legible than the various impressions of itself which blurred his nose and forehead. It is curious to consider, in such a case as Mr. Boffin's, what a cheap article ink is, and how far it may be made to go. As a grain of musk will scent a drawer for many years, and still lose nothing appreciable of its original weight, so a halfpennyworth of ink would blot Mr. Boffin to the roots of his hair and the calves of his legs, without inscribing a line on the paper before him or appearing to diminish in the inkstand.

Mr. Boffin was in such severe literary difficulties that his eyes were prominent and fixed, and his breathing was stertorous, when, to the great relief of Mrs. Boffin, who observed these symptoms with alarm, the yard bell rang.

"Who's that, I wonder?" said Mrs. Boffin.

Mr. Boffin drew a long breath, laid down his pen, looked at his notes as doubting whether he had the pleasure of their acquaintance, and appeared, on a second perusal of their countenances, to be confirmed in his impression that he had not, when there was announced by the hammer-headed young man: —

"Mr. Rokesmith."

"Oh!" said Mr. Boffin. "Oh, indeed! Our and the Wilfers' Mutual Friend, my dear. Yes. Ask him to come in."

Mr. Rokesmith appeared.

"Sit down, sir," said Mr. Boffin, shaking hands with him. "Mrs. Boffin you're already acquainted with. Well, sir, I am rather unprepared to see you, for, to tell you the truth, I've been so busy with one thing and another, that I've not had time to turn your offer over."

"That's apology for both of us: for Mr. Boffin, and for me as well," said the smiling Mrs. Boffin. "But Lor! we can talk it over now, can't us?"

Mr. Rokesmith bowed, thanked her, and said he hoped so.

"Let me see, then," resumed Mr. Boffin, with his hand to his chin. "It was Secretary that you named; wasn't it?"

"I said Secretary," assented Mr. Rokesmith.

"It rather puzzled me at the time," said Mr. Boffin, "and it rather puzzled me and Mrs. Boffin

when we spoke of it afterwards, because (not to make a mystery of our belief) we have always believed a Secretary to be a piece of furniture, mostly of mahogany, lined with green baize or leather, with a lot of little drawers in it. Now, you won't think I take a liberty when I mention that you certainly ain't *that*."

Certainly not, said Mr. Rokesmith. But he had used the word in the sense of Steward.

"Why, as to Steward, you see," returned Mr. Boffin, with his hand still to his chin, "the odds are that Mrs. Boffin and me may never go upon the water. Being both bad sailors, we should want a Steward if we did; but there's generally one provided."

Mr. Rokesmith again explained; defining the duties he sought to undertake as those of general superintendent, or manager, or overlooker, or man of business.

"Now, for instance — come!" said Mr. Boffin in his pouncing way. "If you entered my employment, what would you do?"

"I would keep exact accounts of all the expenditure you sanctioned, Mr. Boffin. I would write your letters under your directions. I would transact your business with people in your pay or employment. I would," with a glance and a half-smile at the table, "arrange your papers" —

Mr. Boffin rubbed his inky ear, and looked at his wife.

"— And so arrange them as to have them always in order for immediate reference, with a note of the contents of each outside it."

"I tell you what," said Mr. Boffin, slowly crum-

pling his own blotted note in his hand; "if you'll turn to at these present papers, and see what you can make of 'em, I shall know better what I can make of you."

No sooner said than done. Relinquishing his hat and gloves, Mr. Rokesmith sat down quietly at the table, arranged the open papers into an orderly heap, cast his eyes over each in succession, folded it, docketed it on the outside, laid it in a second heap, and, when that second heap was complete and the first gone, took from his pocket a piece of string, and tied it together with a remarkably dexterous hand at a running curve and a loop.

"Good!" said Mr. Boffin. "Very good! Now let us hear what they're all about; will you be so good?"

John Rokesmith read his abstracts aloud. They were all about the new house. Decorator's estimate, so much. Furniture estimate, so much. Estimate for furniture of offices, so much. Coachmaker's estimate, so much. Horse dealer's estimate, so much. Harness-maker's estimate, so much. Goldsmith's estimate, so much. Total, so very much. Then came correspondence. Acceptance of Mr. Boffin's offer of such a date, and to such an effect. Rejection of Mr. Boffin's proposal of such a date, and to such an effect. Concerning Mr. Boffin's scheme of such another date, to such another effect. All compact and methodical.

"Apple-pie order!" said Mr. Boffin, after checking off each inscription with his hand, like a man beating time. "And whatever you do with your ink, *I* can't think, for you're as clean as a whistle after it. Now, as to a letter. Let's," said Mr.

Boffin, rubbing his hands in his pleasantly childish admiration, "let's try a letter next."

"To whom shall it be addressed, Mr. Boffin?"

"Any one. Yourself."

Mr. Rokesmith quickly wrote, and then read aloud: —

"'Mr. Boffin presents his compliments to Mr. John Rokesmith, and begs to say that he has decided on giving Mr. John Rokesmith a trial in the capacity he desires to fill. Mr. Boffin takes Mr. John Rokesmith at his word, in postponing to some indefinite period the consideration of salary. It is quite understood that Mr. Boffin is in no way committed on that point. Mr. Boffin has merely to add, that he relies on Mr. John Rokesmith's assurance that he will be faithful and serviceable. Mr. John Rokesmith will please enter on his duties immediately!'"

"Well! Now, Noddy!" cried Mrs. Boffin, clapping her hands, "that *is* a good one!"

Mr. Boffin was no less delighted; indeed, in his own bosom, he regarded both the composition itself, and the device that had given birth to it, as a very remarkable monument of human ingenuity.

"And I tell you, my deary," said Mrs. Boffin, "that if you don't close with Mr. Rokesmith now at once, and if you ever go a-muddling yourself again with things never meant nor made for you, you'll have an apoplexy — besides iron-moulding your linen — and you'll break my heart."

Mr. Boffin embraced his spouse for these words of wisdom, and then, congratulating John Rokesmith on the brilliancy of his achievements, gave him his

hand in pledge of their new relations. So did Mrs. Boffin.

"Now," said Mr. Boffin, who, in his frankness, felt that it did not become him to have a gentleman in his employment five minutes without reposing some confidence in him, "you must be let a little more into our affairs, Rokesmith. I mentioned to you, when I made your acquaintance, or I might better say when you made mine, that Mrs. Boffin's inclinations was setting in the way of Fashion, but that I didn't know how fashionable we might or might not grow. Well! Mrs. Boffin has carried the day, and we're going in neck and crop for Fashion."

"I rather inferred that, sir," replied John Rokesmith, "from the scale on which your new establishment is to be maintained."

"Yes," said Mr. Boffin, "it's to be a Spanker. The fact is, my literary man named to me that a house with which he is, as I may say, connected — in which he has an interest" —

"As property?" inquired John Rokesmith.

"Why, no," said Mr. Boffin, "not exactly that; a sort of a family tie."

"Association?" the Secretary suggested.

"Ah!" said Mr. Boffin. "Perhaps. Anyhow, he named to me that the house had a board up, 'This Eminently Aristocratic Mansion to be let or sold.' Me and Mrs. Boffin went to look at it, and finding it beyond a doubt Eminently Aristocratic (though a trifle high and dull, which, after all, may be part of the same thing), took it. My literary man was so friendly as to drop into a charming piece of poetry on that occasion, in which he com-

plimented Mrs. Boffin on coming into possession of — How did it go, my dear?"

Mrs. Boffin replied, —

"'The gay, the gay and festive scene,
The halls, the halls of dazzling light.'"

"That's it! And it was made neater by there really being two halls in the house, a front 'un and a back 'un, besides the servants'. He likewise dropped into a very pretty piece of poetry to be sure, respecting the extent to which he would be willing to put himself out of the way to bring Mrs. Boffin round, in case she should ever get low in her spirits in the house. Mrs. Boffin has a wonderful memory. Will you repeat it, my dear?"

Mrs. Boffin complied, by reciting the verses in which this obliging offer had been made, exactly as she had received them.

"'I'll tell thee how the maiden wept, Mrs. Boffin,
When her true love was slain, ma'am,
And how her broken spirit slept, Mrs. Boffin,
And never woke again, ma'am.
I'll tell thee (if agreeable to Mr. Boffin) how the steed drew nigh,
And left his lord afar;
And if my tale (which I hope Mr. Boffin might excuse) should make you sigh,
I'll strike the light guitar.'"

"Correct to the letter!" said Mr. Boffin. "And I consider that the poetry brings us both in, in a beautiful manner."

The effect of the poem on the Secretary being evidently to astonish him, Mr. Boffin was confirmed in his high opinion of it, and was greatly pleased.

"Now, you see, Rokesmith," he went on, "a literary man — *with* a wooden leg — is liable to jealousy. I shall therefore cast about for comfortable ways and means of not calling up Wegg's jealousy, but of keeping you in your department, and keeping him in his."

"Lor!" cried Mrs. Boffin. "What I say is, the world's wide enough for all of us!"

"So it is, my dear," said Mr. Boffin, "when not literary. But when so, not so. And I am bound to bear in mind that I took Wegg on at a time when I had no thought of being fashionable, or of leaving the Bower. To let him feel himself anywise slighted now, would be to be guilty of a meanness, and to act like having one's head turned by the halls of dazzling light. Which Lord forbid! Rokesmith, what shall we say about your living in the house?"

"In this house?"

"No, no. I have got other plans for this house. In the new house?"

"That will be as you please, Mr. Boffin. I hold myself quite at your disposal. You know where I live at present."

"Well!" said Mr. Boffin after considering the point; "suppose you keep as you are for the present, and we'll decide by and by. You'll begin to take charge at once of all that's going on in the new house, will you?"

"Most willingly. I will begin this very day. Will you give me the address?"

Mr. Boffin repeated it, and the Secretary wrote it down in his pocket-book. Mrs. Boffin took the opportunity of his being so engaged, to get a better

observation of his face than she had yet taken. It impressed her in his favor, for she nodded aside to Mr. Boffin, "I like him."

"I will see directly that everything is in train, Mr. Boffin."

"Thankee. Being here, would you care at all to look round the Bower?"

"I should greatly like it. I have heard so much of its story."

"Come!" said Mr. Boffin. And he and Mrs. Boffin led the way.

A gloomy house the Bower, with sordid signs on it of having been, through its long existence as Harmony Jail, in miserly holding. Bare of paint, bare of paper on the walls, bare of furniture, bare of experience of human life. Whatever is built by man for man's occupation must, like natural creations, fulfil the intention of its existence, or soon perish. This old house had wasted more from desuetude than it would have wasted from use, twenty years for one.

A certain leanness falls upon houses not sufficiently imbued with life (as if they were nourished upon it), which was very noticeable here. The staircase, balustrades, and rails had a spare look — an air of being denuded to the bone — which the panels of the walls and the jambs of the doors and windows also bore. The scanty movables partook of it; save for the cleanliness of the place, the dust into which they were all resolving would have lain thick on the floors; and those, both in color and in grain, were worn like old faces that had kept much alone.

The bedroom where the clutching old man had

lost his grip on life was left as he had left it. There was the old grisly four-post bedstead, without hangings, and with a jail-like upper rim of iron and spikes; and there was the old patchwork counterpane. There was the tight-clenched old bureau, receding atop like a bad and secret forehead; there was the cumbersome old table with twisted legs at the bedside; and there was the box upon it, in which the will had lain. A few old chairs with patchwork covers, under which the more precious stuff to be preserved had slowly lost its quality of color without imparting pleasure to any eye, stood against the wall. A hard family likeness was on all these things.

"The room was kept like this, Rokesmith," said Mr. Boffin, "against the son's return. In short, everything in the house was kept exactly as it came to us, for him to see and approve. Even now, nothing is changed but our own room below-stairs that you have just left. When the son came home for the last time in his life, and for the last time in his life saw his father, it was most likely in this room that they met."

As the Secretary looked all round it, his eyes rested on a side-door in the corner.

"Another staircase," said Mr. Boffin, unlocking the door, "leading down into the yard. We'll go down this way, as you may like to see the yard, and it's all in the road. When the son was a little child, it was up and down these stairs that he mostly came and went to his father. He was very timid of his father. I've seen him sit on these stairs, in his shy way, many a time. Me and Mrs. Boffin have comforted him, sitting with his little book on these stairs, often."

"Ah! And his poor sister too," said Mrs. Boffin. "And here's the sunny place on the white wall where they one day measured one another. Their own little hands wrote up their names here, only with a pencil; but the names are here still, and the poor dears gone forever."

"We must take care of the names, old lady," said Mr. Boffin. "We must take care of the names. They shan't be rubbed out in our time, nor yet, if we can help it, in the time after us. Poor little children!"

"Ah, poor little children!" said Mrs. Boffin.

They had opened the door at the bottom of the staircase giving on the yard, and they stood in the sunlight, looking at the scrawl of the two unsteady childish hands two or three steps up the staircase. There was something in this simple memento of a blighted childhood, and in the tenderness of Mrs. Boffin, that touched the Secretary.

Mr. Boffin then showed his new man of business the Mounds, and his own particular Mound which had been left him as his legacy under the will before he acquired the whole estate.

"It would have been enough for us," said Mr. Boffin, "in case it had pleased God to spare the last of those two young lives and sorrowful deaths. We didn't want the rest."

At the treasures of the yard, and at the outside of the house, and at the detached building which Mr. Boffin pointed out as the residence of himself and his wife during the many years of their service, the Secretary looked with interest. It was not until Mr. Boffin had shown him every wonder of the Bower twice over that he remembered his having duties to discharge elsewhere.

"You have no instructions to give me, Mr. Boffin, in reference to this place?"

"Not any, Rokesmith. No."

"Might I ask, without seeming impertinent, whether you have any intention of selling it?"

"Certainly not. In remembrance of our old master, our old master's children, and our old service, me and Mrs. Boffin mean to keep it up as it stands."

The Secretary's eyes glanced with so much meaning in them at the Mounds, that Mr. Boffin said, as if in answer to a remark:—

"Ay, ay, that's another thing. I may sell *them*, though I should be sorry to see the neighborhood deprived of 'em too. It'll look but a poor dead flat without the Mounds. Still I don't say that I'm going to keep 'em always there, for the sake of the beauty of the landscape. There's no hurry about it; that's all I say at present. I ain't a scholar in much, Rokesmith, but I'm a pretty fair scholar in dust. I can price the Mounds to a fraction, and I know how they can be best disposed of, and likewise that they take no harm by standing where they do. You'll look in to-morrow, will you be so kind?"

"Every day. And the sooner I can get you into your new house, complete, the better you will be pleased, sir?"

"Well, it ain't that I'm in a mortal hurry," said Mr. Boffin; "only when you *do* pay people for looking alive, it's as well to know that they *are* looking alive. Ain't that your opinion?"

"Quite," replied the Secretary; and so withdrew.

"Now," said Mr. Boffin to himself, subsiding into his regular series of turns in the yard, "if I can

make it comfortable with Wegg, my affairs will be going smooth."

The man of low cunning had, of course, acquired a mastery over the man of high simplicity. The mean man had, of course, got the better of the generous man. How long such conquests last is another matter; that they are achieved is every-day experience, not even to be flourished away by Podsnappery itself. The undesigning Boffin had become so far immeshed by the wily Wegg, that his mind misgave him he was a very designing man indeed in purposing to do more for Wegg. It seemed to him (so skilful was Wegg) that he was plotting darkly, when he was contriving to do the very thing that Wegg was plotting to get him to do. And thus, while he was mentally turning the kindest of kind faces on Wegg this morning, he was not absolutely sure but that he might somehow deserve the charge of turning his back on him.

For these reasons Mr. Boffin passed but anxious hours until evening came, and with it Mr. Wegg, stumping leisurely to the Roman Empire. At about this period Mr. Boffin had become profoundly interested in the fortunes of a great military leader known to him as Bully Sawyers, but perhaps better known to fame, and easier of identification by the classical student, under the less Britannic name of Belisarius. Even this general's career paled in interest for Mr. Boffin before the clearing of his conscience with Wegg; and hence, when that literary gentleman had according to custom eaten and drunk until he was all aglow, and when he took up his book with the usual chirping introduction, "And now, Mr. Boffin, sir, we'll decline and we'll fall!" Mr. Boffin stopped him.

"You remember, Wegg, when I first told you that I wanted to make a sort of offer to you?"

"Let me get on my considering cap, sir," replied that gentleman, turning the open book face downward. "When you first told me that you wanted to make a sort of offer to me? Now let me think." (As if there were the least necessity.) "Yes, to be sure I do, Mr. Boffin. It was at my corner. To be sure it was! You had first asked me whether I liked your name, and Candor had compelled a reply in the negative case. I little thought then, sir, how familiar that name would come to be!"

"I hope it will be more familiar still, Wegg."

"Do you, Mr. Boffin? Much obliged to you, I'm sure. Is it your pleasure, sir, that we decline and we fall?" with a feint of taking up the book.

"Not just yet awhile, Wegg. In fact, I have got another offer to make you."

Mr. Wegg (who had had nothing else in his mind for several nights) took off his spectacles with an air of bland surprise.

"And I hope you'll like it, Wegg."

"Thank you, sir," returned that reticent individual. "I hope it may prove so. On all accounts, I am sure." (This, as a philanthropic aspiration.)

"What do you think," said Mr. Boffin, "of not keeping a stall, Wegg?"

"I think, sir," replied Wegg, "that I should like to be shown the gentleman prepared to make it worth my while!"

"Here he is," said Mr. Boffin.

Mr. Wegg was going to say My Benefactor, and had said My Bene, when a grandiloquent change came over him.

"No, Mr. Boffin, not you, sir. Anybody but you. Do not fear, Mr. Boffin, that I shall contaminate the premises which your gold has bought, with *my* lowly pursuits. I am aware, sir, that it would not become me to carry on my little traffic under the windows of your mansion. I have already thought of that, and taken my measures. No need to be bought out, sir. Would Stepney Fields be considered intrusive? If not remote enough, I can go remoter. In the words of the poet's song, which I do not quite remember:—

'Thrown on the wide world, doom'd to wander and roam,
Bereft of my parents, bereft of a home,
A stranger to something and what's his name joy,
Behold little Edmund, the poor Peasant boy.'

—And equally," said Mr. Wegg, repairing the want of direct application in the last line, "behold myself on a similar footing!"

"Now, Wegg, Wegg, Wegg!" remonstrated the excellent Boffin. "You are too sensitive."

"I know I am, sir," returned Wegg, with obstinate magnanimity. "I am acquainted with my faults. I always was, from a child, too sensitive."

"But listen," pursued the Golden Dustman; "hear me out, Wegg. You have taken it into your head that I mean to pension you off."

"True, sir," returned Wegg, still with an obstinate magnanimity. "I am acquainted with my faults. Far be it from me to deny them. I *have* taken it into my head."

"But I *don't* mean it."

The assurance seemed hardly as comforting to Mr. Wegg as Mr. Boffin intended it to be. Indeed,

an appreciable elongation of his visage might have been observed as he replied,—

"Don't you indeed, sir?"

"No," pursued Mr. Boffin; "because that would express, as I understand it, that you were not going to do anything to deserve your money. But you are; you are."

"That, sir," replied Mr. Wegg, cheering up bravely, "is quite another pair of shoes. Now, my independence as a man is again elevated. Now, I no longer

> 'Weep for the hour,
> When to Boffinses bower,
> The lord of the valley with offers came;
> Neither does the moon hide her light
> From the heavens to-night,
> And weep behind her clouds o'er any individual in the present
> Company's shame.'

— Please to proceed, Mr. Boffin."

"Thankee, Wegg, both for your confidence in me and for your frequent dropping into poetry; both of which is friendly. Well, then; my idea is, that you should give up your stall, and that I should put you into the Bower here, to keep it for us. It's a pleasant spot; and a man with coals and candles, and a pound a week, might be in clover here."

"Hem! Would that man, sir — we will say that man, for the purposes of argueyment;" Mr. Wegg made a smiling demonstration of great perspicuity here; "would that man, sir, be expected to throw any other capacity in, or would any other capacity be considered extra? Now let us (for the purposes of argueyment) suppose that man to be engaged as

a reader: say (for the purposes of argueyment) in the evening. Would that man's pay, as a reader in the evening, be added to the other amount, which, adopting your language, we will call clover; or would it emerge into that amount, or clover?"

"Well," said Mr. Boffin, "I suppose it would be added."

"I suppose it would, sir. You are right, sir. Exactly my own views, Mr. Boffin." Here Wegg rose, and, balancing himself on his wooden leg, fluttered over his prey with extended hand. "Mr. Boffin, consider it done. Say no more, sir, not a word more. My stall and I are forever parted. The collection of ballads will in future be reserved for private study with the object of making poetry tributary" — Wegg was so proud of having found this word, that he said it again, with a capital letter — "Tributary to friendship. Mr. Boffin, don't allow yourself to be made uncomfortable by the pang it gives me to part from my stock and stall. Similar emotion was undergone by my own father when promoted for his merits from his occupation as a waterman to a situation under Government. His Christian name was Thomas. His words at the time (I was then an infant, but so deep was their impression on me, that I committed them to memory) were, —

'Then farewell my trim-built wherry,
Oars and coat and badge farewell!
Never more at Chelsea Ferry
Shall your Thomas take a spell!'

— My father got over it, Mr. Boffin, and so shall I."

While delivering these valedictory observations, Wegg continually disappointed Mr. Boffin of his

hand by flourishing it in the air. He now darted it at his patron, who took it, and felt his mind relieved of a great weight: observing that, as they had arranged their joint affairs so satisfactorily, he would now be glad to look into those of Bully Sawyers. Which, indeed, had been left overnight in a very unpromising posture, and for whose impending expedition against the Persians the weather had been by no means favorable all day.

Mr. Wegg resumed his spectacles, therefore. But Sawyers was not to be of the party that night; for, before Wegg had found his place, Mrs. Boffin's tread was heard upon the stairs, so unusually heavy and hurried, that Mr. Boffin would have started up at the sound, anticipating some occurrence much out of the common course, even though she had not also called to him in an agitated tone.

Mr. Boffin hurried out, and found her on the dark staircase, panting, with a lighted candle in her hand.

"What's the matter, my dear?"

"I don't know; I don't know; but I wish you'd come upstairs."

Much surprised Mr. Boffin went upstairs, and accompanied Mrs. Boffin into their own room: a second large room on the same floor as the room in which the late proprietor had died. Mr. Boffin looked all round him, and saw nothing more unusual than various articles of folded linen on a large chest, which Mrs. Boffin had been sorting.

"What is it, my dear? Why, you're frightened! *You* frightened?"

"I am not one of that sort, certainly," said Mrs. Boffin, as she sat down in a chair to recover her-

self, and took her husband's arm; "but it's very strange!"

"What is, my dear?"

"Noddy, the faces of the old man and the two children are all over the house to-night."

"My dear!" exclaimed Mr. Boffin. But not without a certain uncomfortable sensation gliding down his back.

"I know it must sound foolish, and yet it is so."

"Where did you think you saw them?"

"I don't know that I think I saw them anywhere. I felt them."

"Touched them?"

"No. Felt them in the air. I was sorting those things on the chest, and not thinking of the old man or the children, but singing to myself, when all in a moment I felt there was a face growing out of the dark."

"What face?" asked her husband, looking about him.

"For a moment it was the old man's, and then it got younger. For a moment it was both the children's, and then it got older. For a moment it was a strange face, and then it was all the faces."

"And then it was gone?"

"Yes; and then it was gone."

"Where were you then, old lady?"

"Here, at the chest. Well; I got the better of it, and went on sorting, and went on singing to myself. 'Lor!' I says, 'I'll think of something else — something comfortable — and put it out of my head.' So I thought of the new house and Miss Bella Wilfer, and was thinking at a great rate with that sheet there in my hand, when, all of a sudden,

the faces seemed to be hidden in among the folds of it, and I let it drop."

As it still lay on the floor where it had fallen, Mr. Boffin picked it up and laid it on the chest.

"And then you ran downstairs?"

"No. I thought I'd try another room, and shake it off. I says to myself, 'I'll go and walk slowly up and down the old man's room three times, from end to end, and then I shall have conquered it.' I went in with the candle in my hand; but the moment I came near the bed, the air got thick with them."

"With the faces?"

"Yes; and I even felt they were in the dark behind the side-door, and on the little staircase, floating away into the yard. Then I called you."

Mr. Boffin, lost in amazement, looked at Mrs. Boffin. Mrs. Boffin, lost in her own fluttered inability to make this out, looked at Mr. Boffin.

"I think, my dear," said the Golden Dustman, "I'll at once get rid of Wegg for the night, because he's coming to inhabit the Bower, and it might be put into his head, or somebody else's, if he heard this, and it got about, that the house is haunted. Whereas, we know better. Don't we?"

"I never had the feeling in the house before," said Mrs. Boffin; "and I have been about it alone at all hours of the night. I have been in the house when Death was in it, and I have been in the house when Murder was a new part of its adventures, and I never had a fright in it yet."

"And won't again, my dear," said Mr. Boffin. "Depend upon it, it comes of thinking and dwelling on that dark spot."

"Yes; but why didn't it come before?" asked Mrs. Boffin.

This draft on Mr. Boffin's philosophy could only be met by that gentleman with the remark that everything that is at all, must begin at some time. Then, tucking his wife's arm under his own, that she might not be left by herself to be troubled again, he descended to release Wegg. Who, being something drowsy after his plentiful repast, and constitutionally of a shirking temperament, was well enough pleased to stump away, without doing what he had come to do, and was paid for doing.

Mr. Boffin then put on his hat, and Mrs. Boffin her shawl; and the pair, further provided with a bunch of keys and a lighted lantern, went all over the dismal house — dismal everywhere, but in their own two rooms — from cellar to cock-loft. Not resting satisfied with giving that much chase to Mrs. Boffin's fancies, they pursued them into the yard and outbuildings, and under the Mounds. And setting the lantern, when all was done, at the foot of one of the Mounds, they comfortably trotted to and fro for an evening walk, to the end that the murky cobwebs in Mrs. Boffin's brain might be blown away.

"There, my dear!" said Mr. Boffin when they came in to supper. "That was the treatment, you see. Completely worked round, haven't you?"

"Yes, deary," said Mrs. Boffin, laying aside her shawl. "I'm not nervous any more. I'm not a bit troubled now. I'd go anywhere about the house the same as ever. But"—

"Eh?" said Mr. Boffin.

"But I've only to shut my eyes."

"And what then?"

"Why, then," said Mrs. Boffin, speaking with her eyes closed, and her left hand thoughtfully touching her brow, "then, there they are! The old man's face, and it gets younger. The two children's faces, and they get older. A face that I don't know. And then all the faces!"

Opening her eyes again, and seeing her husband's face across the table, she leaned forward to give it a pat on the cheek, and sat down to supper, declaring it to be the best face in the world.

CHAPTER XVI.

MINDERS AND REMINDERS.

THE Secretary lost no time in getting to work, and his vigilance and method soon set their mark on the Golden Dustman's affairs. His earnestness in determining to understand the length and depth and breadth of every piece of work submitted to him by his employer was as special as his despatch in transacting it. He accepted no information or explanation at second-hand, but made himself the master of everything confided to him.

One part of the Secretary's conduct, underlying all the rest, might have been mistrusted by a man with a better knowledge of men than the Golden Dustman had. The Secretary was as far from being inquisitive or intrusive as Secretary could be, but nothing less than a complete understanding of the whole of the affairs would content him. It soon became apparent (from the knowledge with which he set out) that he must have been to the office where the Harmon will was registered, and must have read the will. He anticipated Mr. Boffin's consideration whether he should be advised with on this or that topic, by showing that he already knew of it and understood it. He did this with no

attempt at concealment, seeming to be satisfied that it was part of his duty to have prepared himself at all attainable points for its utmost discharge.

This might — let it be repeated — have awakened some little vague mistrust in a man more worldly wise than the Golden Dustman. On the other hand, the Secretary was discerning, discreet, and silent, though as zealous as if the affairs had been his own. He showed no love of patronage or the command of money, but distinctly preferred resigning both to Mr. Boffin. If, in his limited sphere, he sought power, it was the power of knowledge; the power derivable from a perfect comprehension of his business.

As on the Secretary's face there was a nameless cloud, so on his manner there was a shadow equally indefinable. It was not that he was embarrassed, as on that first night with the Wilfer family; he was habitually unembarrassed now, and yet the something remained. It was not that his manner was bad, as on that occasion; it was now very good, as being modest, gracious, and ready. Yet the something never left it. It has been written of men who have undergone a cruel captivity, or who have passed through a terrible strait, or who in self-preservation have killed a defenceless fellow-creature, that the record thereof has never faded from their countenances until they died. Was there any such record here?

He established a temporary office for himself in the new house, and all went on well under his hand, with one singular exception. He manifestly objected to communicate with Mr. Boffin's solicitor. Two or three times, when there was some slight

occasion for his doing so, he transferred the task to Mr. Boffin; and his evasion of it soon became so curiously apparent, that Mr. Boffin spoke to him on the subject of his reluctance.

"It is so," the Secretary admitted. "I would rather not."

Had he any personal objection to Mr. Lightwood?

"I don't know him."

Had he suffered from lawsuits?

"Not more than other men," was his short answer.

Was he prejudiced against the race of lawyers?

"No. But while I am in your employment, sir, I would rather be excused from going between the lawyer and the client. Of course, if you press it, Mr. Boffin, I am ready to comply. But I should take it as a great favor if you would not press it without urgent occasion."

Now, it could not be said that there *was* urgent occasion, for Lightwood retained no other affairs in his hands than such as still lingered and languished about the undiscovered criminal, and such as arose out of the purchase of the house. Many other matters that might have travelled to him, now stopped short at the Secretary, under whose administration they were far more expeditiously and satisfactorily disposed of than they would have been if they had got into Young Blight's domain. This the Golden Dustman quite understood. Even the matter immediately in hand was of very little moment as requiring personal appearance on the Secretary's part, for it amounted to no more than this: — The death of Hexam rendering the sweat of the honest man's brow unprofitable, the honest man had shufflingly declined to moisten his brow for nothing, with

that severe exertion which is known in legal circles as swearing your way through a stone wall. Consequently, that new light had gone sputtering out. But, the airing of the old facts had led some one concerned to suggest that it would be well, before they were re-consigned to their gloomy shelf — now probably forever — to induce or compel Mr. Julius Handford to reappear and be questioned. And all traces of Mr. Julius Handford being lost, Lightwood now referred to his client for authority to seek him through public advertisement.

"Does your objection go to writing to Lightwood, Rokesmith?"

"Not in the least, sir."

"Then perhaps you'll write him a line, and say he is free to do what he likes. I don't think it promises."

"*I* don't think it promises," said the Secretary.

"Still, he may do what he likes."

"I will write immediately. Let me thank you for so considerately yielding to my disinclination. It may seem less unreasonable if I avow to you that, although I don't know Mr. Lightwood, I have a disagreeable association connected with him. It is not his fault; he is not at all to blame for it, and does not even know my name."

Mr. Boffin dismissed the matter with a nod or two. The letter was written, and next day Mr. Julius Handford was advertised for. He was requested to place himself in communication with Mr. Mortimer Lightwood, as a possible means of furthering the ends of justice, and a reward was offered to any one acquainted with his whereabout who would communicate the same to the said Mr.

Mortimer Lightwood at his office in the Temple. Every day for six weeks this advertisement appeared at the head of all the newspapers, and every day for six weeks the Secretary, when he saw it, said to himself, in the tone in which he had said to his employer, — "*I* don't think it promises!"

Among his first occupations the pursuit of that orphan wanted by Mrs. Boffin held a conspicuous place. From the earliest moment of his engagement he showed a particular desire to please her, and knowing her to have this object at heart, he followed it up with unwearying alacrity and interest.

Mr. and Mrs. Milvey had found their search a difficult one. Either an eligible orphan was of the wrong sex (which almost always happened), or was too old, or too young, or too sickly, or too dirty, or too much accustomed to the streets, or too likely to run away; or it was found impossible to complete the philanthropic transaction without buying the orphan. For, the instant it became known that anybody wanted the orphan, up started some affectionate relative of the orphan, who put a price upon the orphan's head. The suddenness of an orphan's rise in the market was not to be paralleled by the maddest records of the Stock Exchange. He would be at five thousand per cent. discount out at nurse making a mud pie at nine in the morning, and (being inquired for) would go up to five thousand per cent. premium before noon. The market was "rigged" in various artful ways. Counterfeit stock got into circulation. Parents boldly represented themselves as dead, and brought their orphans with them. Genuine orphan stock was surreptitiously withdrawn from the market. It being announced,

by emissaries posted for the purpose, that Mr. and Mrs. Milvey were coming down the court, orphan scrip would be instantly concealed, and production refused, save on a condition usually stated by the brokers as "a gallon of beer." Likewise, fluctuations of a wild and South-Sea nature were occasioned by orphan-holders keeping back, and then rushing into the market a dozen together. But, the uniform principle at the root of all these various operations was bargain and sale; and that principle could not be recognized by Mr. and Mrs. Milvey.

At length tidings were received by the Reverend Frank of a charming orphan to be found at Brentford. One of the deceased parents (late his parishioners) had a poor widowed grandmother in that agreeable town, and she, Mrs. Betty Higden, had carried off the orphan with maternal care, but could not afford to keep him.

The Secretary proposed to Mrs. Boffin, either to go down himself and take a preliminary survey of this orphan, or to drive her down, that she might at once form her own opinion. Mrs. Boffin preferring the latter course, they set off one morning in a hired phaeton, conveying the hammer-headed young man behind them.

The abode of Mrs. Betty Higden was not easy to find, lying in such complicated back-settlements of muddy Brentford that they left their equipage at the sign of the Three Magpies, and went in search of it on foot. After many inquiries and defeats, there was pointed out to them, in a lane, a very small cottage residence, with a board across the open doorway, hooked on to which board by the armpits was a young gentleman of tender years, angling

for mud with a headless wooden horse and line. In this young sportsman, distinguished by a crisply-curling auburn head and a bluff countenance, the Secretary descried the orphan.

It unfortunately happened, as they quickened their pace, that the orphan, lost to consideration of personal safety in the ardor of the movement, overbalanced himself and toppled into the street. Being an orphan of a chubby conformation, he then took to rolling, and had rolled into the gutter before they could come up. From the gutter he was rescued by John Rokesmith, and thus the first meeting with Mrs. Higden was inaugurated by the awkward circumstance of their being in possession — one would say, at first sight, unlawful possession — of the orphan, upside-down, and purple in the countenance. The board across the doorway, too, acting as a trap equally for the feet of Mrs. Higden coming out, and the feet of Mrs. Boffin and John Rokesmith going in, greatly increased the difficulty of the situation: to which the cries of the orphan imparted a lugubrious and inhuman character.

At first it was impossible to explain, on account of the orphan's "holding his breath;" a most terrific proceeding, superinducing, in the orphan, lead-color rigidity and a deadly silence, compared with which his cries were music yielding the height of enjoyment. But, as he gradually recovered, Mrs. Boffin gradually introduced herself, and smiling peace was gradually wooed back to Mrs. Betty Higden's home.

It was then perceived to be a small home with a large mangle in it, at the handle of which machine stood a very long boy, with a very little head, and an open mouth of disproportionate capacity, that

seemed to assist his eyes in staring at the visitors. In a corner below the mangle, on a couple of stools, sat two very little children; a boy and a girl; and when the very long boy, in an interval of staring, took a turn at the mangle, it was alarming to see how it lunged itself at those two innocents, like a catapult designed for their destruction, harmlessly retiring when within an inch of their heads. The room was clean and neat. It had a brick floor, and a window of diamond panes, and a flounce hanging below the chimney-piece, and strings nailed from bottom to top outside the window, on which scarlet-beans were to grow in the coming season if the Fates were propitious. However propitious they might have been, in the seasons that were gone, to Betty Higden in the matter of beans, they had not been very favorable in the matter of coins; for it was easy to see that she was poor.

She was one of those old women, was Mrs. Betty Higden, who, by dint of an indomitable purpose and a strong constitution, fight out many years, though each year has come with its new knock-down blows fresh to the fight against her, wearied by it; an active old woman, with a bright dark eye and a resolute face, yet quite a tender creature too; not a logically-reasoning woman, but God is good, and hearts may count in heaven as high as heads.

"Yes, sure!" said she, when the business was opened. "Mrs. Milvey had the kindness to write to me, ma'am, and I got Sloppy to read it. It was a pretty letter. But she's an affable lady."

The visitors glanced at the long boy, who seemed to indicate, by a broader stare of his mouth and eyes, that in him Sloppy stood confessed.

"For I ain't, you must know," said Betty, "much of a hand at reading writing-hand, though I can read my Bible and most print. And I do love a newspaper. You mightn't think it, but Sloppy is a beautiful reader of a newspaper. He do the Police in different voices."

The visitors again considered it a point of politeness to look at Sloppy, who, looking at them, suddenly threw back his head, extended his mouth to its utmost width, and laughed loud and long. At this the two innocents, with their brains in that apparent danger, laughed, and Mrs. Higden laughed, and the orphan laughed, and then the visitors laughed. Which was more cheerful than intelligible.

Then Sloppy, seeming to be seized with an industrious mania or fury, turned to at the mangle, and impelled it at the heads of the innocents with such a creaking and rumbling, that Mrs. Higden stopped him.

"The gentlefolks can't hear themselves speak, Sloppy. Bide a bit, bide a bit!"

"Is that the dear child in your lap?" said Mrs. Boffin.

"Yes, ma'am, this is Johnny."

"Johnny, too!" cried Mrs. Boffin, turning to the Secretary; "already Johnny! Only one of the two names left to give him! He's a pretty boy."

With his chin tucked down in his shy, childish manner, he was looking furtively at Mrs. Boffin out of his blue eyes, and reaching his fat, dimpled hand up to the lips of the old woman, who was kissing it by times.

"Yes, ma'am, he's a pretty boy; he's a dear, darling boy; he's the child of my own last left

daughter's daughter. But she's gone the way of all the rest."

"Those are not his brother and sister?" said Mrs. Boffin.

"Oh, dear no, ma'am! Those are Minders."

"Minders?" the Secretary repeated.

"Left to be Minded, sir. I keep a Minding School. I can take only three on account of the Mangle. But I love children, and Fourpence a week is Fourpence. Come here, Toddles and Poddles."

Toddles was the pet name of the boy; Poddles of the girl. At their little unsteady pace, they came across the floor, hand in hand, as if they were traversing an extremely difficult road intersected by brooks, and when they had their heads patted by Mrs. Betty Higden, made lunges at the orphan, dramatically representing an attempt to bear him, crowing, into captivity and slavery. All the three children enjoyed this to a delightful extent, and the sympathetic Sloppy again laughed long and loud. When it was discreet to stop the play, Betty Higden said, "Go to your seats, Toddles and Poddles," and they returned hand in hand across country, seeming to find the brooks rather swollen by late rains.

"And Master — or Mister — Sloppy?" said the Secretary, in doubt whether he was man, boy, or what.

"A love child," returned Betty Higden, dropping her voice; "parents never known; found in the street. He was brought up in the" — with a shiver of repugnance — "the House."

"The Poorhouse?" said the Secretary.

Mrs. Higden set that resolute old face of hers, and darkly nodded yes.

"You dislike the mention of it?"

"Dislike the mention of it!" answered the old woman. "Kill me sooner than take me there. Throw this pretty child under cart-horses' feet and a loaded wagon sooner than take him there. Come to us and find us all a-dying, and set a light to us all where we lie, and let us all blaze away with the house into a heap of cinders, sooner than move a corpse of us there!"

A surprising spirit in this lonely woman, after so many years of hard working and hard living, my Lords and Gentlemen and Honorable Boards! What is it that we call it in our grandiose speeches? British independence, rather perverted? Is that, or something like it, the ring of the cant?

"Do I never read in the newspapers," said the dame, fondling the child — "God help me and the like of me! — how the worn-out people that do come down to that, get driven from post to pillar, and from pillar to post, a purpose to tire them out? Do I never read how they are put off, put off, put off — how they are grudged, grudged, grudged, the shelter, or the doctor, or the drop of physic, or the bit of bread? Do I never read how they grow heart-sick of it, and give it up, after having let themselves drop so low, and how they after all die out for want of help? Then I say, I hope I can die as well as another, and I'll die without that disgrace."

Absolutely impossible, my Lords and Gentlemen and Honorable Boards, by any stretch of legislative wisdom, to set these perverse people right in their logic?

"Johnny, my pretty," continued old Betty, caressing the child, and rather mourning over it

than speaking to it, "your old Granny Betty is nigher fourscore year than threescore and ten. She never begged, nor had a penny of the Union money in all her life. She paid scot and she paid lot when she had money to pay; she worked when she could, and she starved when she must. You pray that your Granny may have strength enough left her, at the last (she's strong for an old one, Johnny), to get up from her bed, and run and hide herself, and swown to death in a hole sooner than fall into the hands of those Cruel Jacks we read of, that dodge and drive, and worry and weary and scorn and shame the decent poor."

A brilliant success, my Lords and Gentlemen and Honorable Boards, to have brought it to this in the minds of the best of the poor! Under submission, might it be worth thinking of at any odd time?

The fright and abhorrence that Mrs. Betty Higden smoothed out of her strong face, as she ended this diversion, showed how seriously she had meant it.

"And does he work for you?" asked the Secretary, gently bringing the discourse back to Master or Mister Sloppy.

"Yes," said Betty with a good-humored smile and nod of the head. "And well too."

"Does he live here?"

"He lives more here than anywhere. He was thought to be no better than a Natural, and first come to me as a Minder. I made interest with Mr. Blogg the Beadle to have him as a Minder, seeing him by chance up at church, and thinking I might do something with him. For he was a weak, rickety creetur then."

"Is he called by his right name?"

"Why, you see, speaking quite correctly, he has no right name. I always understood he took his name from being found on a Sloppy night."

"He seems an amiable fellow."

"Bless you, sir, there's not a bit of him," returned Betty, "that's not amiable. So you may judge how amiable he is, by running your eye along his heighth."

Of an ungainly make was Sloppy. Too much of him long-wise, too little of him broad-wise, and too many sharp angles of him angle-wise. One of those shambling male human creatures, born to be indiscreetly candid in the revelation of buttons; every button he had about him glaring at the public to a quite preternatural extent. A considerable capital of knee and elbow, and wrist and ankle, had Sloppy, and he didn't know how to dispose of it to the best advantage, but was always investing it in wrong securities, and so getting himself into embarrassed circumstances. Full-Private Number One in the Awkward Squad of the rank and file of life was Sloppy, and yet had his glimmering notions of standing true to the Colors.

"And now," said Mrs. Boffin, "concerning Johnny."

As Johnny, with his chin tucked in and his lips pouting, reclined in Betty's lap, concentrating his blue eyes on the visitors, and shading them from observation with a dimpled arm, old Betty took one of his fresh fat hands in her withered right, and fell to gently beating it on her withered left.

"Yes, ma'am. Concerning Johnny."

"If you trust the dear child to me," said Mrs.

Boffin, with a face inviting trust, "he shall have the best of homes, the best of care, the best of education, the best of friends. Please God, I will be a true good mother to him!"

"I am thankful to you, ma'am, and the dear child would be thankful if he was old enough to understand." Still lightly beating the little hand upon her own. "I wouldn't stand in the dear child's light, not if I had all my life before me instead of a very little of it. But I hope you won't take it ill that I cleave to the child closer than words can tell, for he's the last living thing left me."

"Take it ill, my dear soul? Is it likely? And you so tender of him as to bring him home here!"

"I have seen," said Betty, still with that light beat upon her hard rough hand, "so many of them on my lap. And they are all gone but this one! I am ashamed to seem so selfish, but I don't really mean it. It'll be the making of his fortune, and he'll be a gentleman when I am dead. I—I—don't know what comes over me. I—try against it. Don't notice me!" The light beat stopped, the resolute mouth gave way, and the fine strong old face broke up into weakness and tears.

Now, greatly to the relief of the visitors, the emotional Sloppy no sooner beheld his patroness in this condition, than, throwing back his head and throwing open his mouth, he lifted up his voice and bellowed. This alarming note of something wrong instantly terrified Toddles and Poddles, who were no sooner heard to roar surprisingly, than Johnny, curving himself the wrong way and striking out at Mrs. Boffin with a pair of indifferent shoes, became a prey to despair. The absurdity of the

situation put its pathos to the rout. Mrs. Betty Higden was herself in a moment, and brought them all to order with that speed, that Sloppy, stopping short in a polysyllabic bellow, transferred his energy to the mangle, and had taken several penitential turns before he could be stopped.

"There, there, there!" said Mrs. Boffin, almost regarding her kind self as the most ruthless of women. "Nothing is going to be done. Nobody need be frightened. We're all comfortable; ain't we, Mrs. Higden?"

"Sure and certain we are," returned Betty.

"And there really is no hurry, you know," said Mrs. Boffin in a lower voice. "Take time to think of it, my good creature!"

"Don't you fear *me* no more, ma'am," said Betty; "I thought of it for good yesterday. I don't know what come over me just now, but it'll never come again."

"Well, then, Johnny shall have more time to think of it," returned Mrs. Boffin; "the pretty child shall have time to get used to it. And you'll get him more used to it, if you think well of it; won't you?"

Betty undertook that cheerfully and readily.

"Lor," cried Mrs. Boffin, looking radiantly about her, "we want to make everybody happy, not dismal! — And perhaps you wouldn't mind letting me know how used to it you begin to get, and how it all goes on?"

"I'll send Sloppy," said Mrs. Higden.

"And this gentleman who has come with me will pay him for his trouble," said Mrs. Boffin. "And, Mr. Sloppy, whenever you come to my house, be

sure you never go away without having had a good dinner of meat, beer, vegetables, and pudding."

This still further brightened the face of affairs; for, the highly sympathetic Sloppy first broadly staring and grinning, and then roaring with laughter, Toddles and Poddles followed suit, and Johnny trumped the trick. T. and P. considering these favorable circumstances for the resumption of that dramatic descent upon Johnny, again came across country hand in hand upon a buccaneering expedition; and this having been fought out in the chimney-corner, behind Mrs. Higden's chair, with great valor on both sides, those desperate pirates returned hand in hand to their stools, across the dry bed of a mountain torrent.

"You must tell me what I can do for you, Betty, my friend," said Mrs. Boffin confidentially, "if not to-day, next time."

"Thank you all the same, ma'am, but I want nothing for myself. I can work. I'm strong. I can walk twenty mile if I'm put to it." Old Betty was proud, and said it with a sparkle in her bright eyes.

"Yes, but there are some little comforts that you wouldn't be the worse for," returned Mrs. Boffin. "Bless ye, I wasn't born a lady any more than you."

"It seems to me," said Betty, smiling, "that you were born a lady, and a true one, or there never was a lady born. But I couldn't take anything from you, my dear. I never did take anything from any one. It ain't that I'm not grateful, but I love to earn it better."

"Well, well!" returned Mrs. Boffin. "I only spoke of little things, or I wouldn't have taken the liberty."

Betty put her visitor's hand to her lips, in acknowledgment of the delicate answer. Wonderfully upright her figure was, and wonderfully self-reliant her look, as, standing facing her visitor, she explained herself further.

"If I could have kept the dear child, without the dread that's always upon me of his coming to that fate I have spoken of, I could never have parted with him, even to you. For I love him, I love him, I love him! I love my husband long dead and gone, in him; I love my children dead and gone, in him; I love my young and hopeful days dead and gone, in him. I couldn't sell that love, and look you in your bright kind face. It's a free gift. I am in want of nothing. When my strength fails me, if I can but die out quick and quiet, I shall be quite content. I have stood between my dead and that shame I have spoken of, and it has been kept off from every one of them. Sewed into my gown," with her hand upon her breast, "is just enough to lay me in the grave. Only see that it's rightly spent, so as I may rest free to the last from that cruelty and disgrace, and you'll have done much more than a little thing for me, and all that in this present world my heart is set upon."

Mrs. Betty Higden's visitor pressed her hand. There was no more breaking up of the strong old face into weakness. My Lords and Gentlemen and Honorable Boards, it really was as composed as our own faces, and almost as dignified.

And now, Johnny was to be inveigled into occupying a temporary position on Mrs. Boffin's lap. It was not until he had been piqued into competition with the two diminutive Minders, by seeing them

successively raised to that post and retire from it without injury, that he could be by any means induced to leave Mrs. Betty Higden's skirts; towards which he exhibited, even when in Mrs. Boffin's embrace, strong yearnings, spiritual and bodily; the former expressed in a very gloomy visage, the latter in extended arms. However, a general description of the toy-wonders lurking in Mrs. Boffin's house so far conciliated this worldly-minded orphan as to induce him to stare at her frowningly, with a fist in his mouth, and even at length to chuckle when a richly-caparisoned horse on wheels, with a miraculous gift of cantering to cake shops, was mentioned. This sound, being taken up by the Minders, swelled into a rapturous trio which gave general satisfaction.

So, the interview was considered very successful, and Mrs. Boffin was pleased, and all were satisfied. Not least of all Sloppy, who undertook to conduct the visitors back by the best way to the Three Magpies, and whom the hammer-headed young man much despised.

This piece of business thus put in train, the Secretary drove Mrs. Boffin back to the Bower, and found employment for himself at the new house until evening. Whether, when evening came, he took a way to his lodgings that led through fields, with any design of finding Miss Bella Wilfer in those fields, is not so certain as that she regularly walked there at that hour.

And, moreover, it is certain that there she was.

No longer in mourning, Miss Bella was dressed in as pretty colors as she could muster. There is no denying that she was as pretty as they, and that

she and the colors went very prettily together. She was reading as she walked, and of course it is to be inferred, from her showing no knowledge of Mr. Rokesmith's approach, that she did not know he was approaching.

"Eh?" said Miss Bella, raising her eyes from her book, when he stopped before her. "Oh! It's you."

"Only I. A fine evening."

"Is it?" said Bella, looking coldly around. "I suppose it is, now you mention it. I have not been thinking of the evening."

"So intent upon your book?"

"Ye-e-es," replied Bella, with a drawl of indifference.

"A love story, Miss Wilfer?"

"Oh, dear, no, or I shouldn't be reading it. It's more about money than anything else."

"And does it say that money is better than anything?"

"Upon my word," returned Bella, "I forget what it says, but you can find out for yourself, if you like, Mr. Rokesmith. I don't want it any more."

The Secretary took the book — she had fluttered the leaves as if it were a fan — and walked beside her.

"I am charged with a message for you, Miss Wilfer."

"Impossible, I think!" said Bella, with another drawl.

"From Mrs. Boffin. She desired me to assure you of the pleasure she has in finding that she will be ready to receive you in another week or two at furthest."

Bella turned her head towards him, with her prettily insolent eyebrows raised, and her eyelids drooping. As much as to say, "How did you come by the message, pray?"

"I have been waiting for an opportunity of telling you that I am Mr. Boffin's Secretary."

"I am as wise as ever," said Miss Bella loftily, "for I don't know what a Secretary is. Not that it signifies."

"Not at all."

A covert glance at her face, as he walked beside her, showed him that she had not expected his ready assent to that proposition.

"Then are you going to be always there, Mr. Rokesmith?" she inquired, as if that would be a drawback.

"Always? No. Very much there? Yes."

"Dear me!" drawled Bella, in a tone of mortification.

"But my position there as Secretary will be very different from yours as guest. You will know little or nothing about me. I shall transact the business; you will transact the pleasure. I shall have my salary to earn; you will have nothing to do but to enjoy and attract."

"Attract, sir?" said Bella, again with her eyebrows raised, and her eyelids drooping. "I don't understand you."

Without replying on this point, Mr. Rokesmith went on: "Excuse me; when I first saw you in your black dress"—

("There!" was Miss Bella's mental exclamation. "What did I say to them at home? Everybody noticed that ridiculous mourning.")

"When I first saw you in your black dress, I was at a loss to account for that distinction between yourself and your family. I hope it was not impertinent to speculate upon it."

"I hope not, I am sure," said Miss Bella haughtily. "But you ought to know best how you speculated upon it."

Mr. Rokesmith inclined his head in a deprecatory manner, and went on:

"Since I have been intrusted with Mr. Boffin's affairs, I have necessarily come to understand the little mystery. I venture to remark that much of your loss may be repaired. I speak, of course, merely of wealth, Miss Wilfer. The loss of a perfect stranger, whose worth, or worthlessness, I cannot estimate — nor you either — is beside the question. But this excellent gentleman and lady are so full of simplicity, so full of generosity, so inclined towards you, and so desirous to — how shall I express it? — to make amends for their good fortune, that you have only to respond."

As he watched her with another covert look, he saw a certain ambitious triumph in her face which no assumed coldness could conceal.

"As we have been brought under one roof by an accidental combination of circumstances, which oddly extends itself to the new relations before us, I have taken the liberty of saying these few words. You don't consider them intrusive, I hope?" said the Secretary with deference.

"Really, Mr. Rokesmith, I can't say what I consider them," returned the young lady. "They are perfectly new to me, and may be founded altogether on your own imagination."

"You will see."

These same fields were opposite the Wilfer premises. The discreet Mrs. Wilfer, now looking out of window and beholding her daughter in conference with her lodger, instantly tied up her head and came out for a casual walk.

"I have been telling Miss Wilfer," said John Rokesmith as the majestic lady came stalking up, "that I have become, by a curious chance, Mr. Boffin's Secretary, or man of business."

"I have not," returned Mrs. Wilfer, waving her gloves in her chronic state of dignity and vague ill-usage, "the honor of any intimate acquaintance with Mr. Boffin, and it is not for me to congratulate that gentleman on the acquisition he has made."

"A poor one enough," said Rokesmith.

"Pardon me," returned Mrs. Wilfer, "the merits of Mr. Boffin may be highly distinguished — may be more distinguished than the countenance of Mrs. Boffin would imply — but it were the insanity of humility to deem him worthy of a better assistant."

"You are very good. I have also been telling Miss Wilfer that she is expected very shortly at the new residence in town."

"Having tacitly consented," said Mrs. Wilfer, with a grand shrug of her shoulders, and another wave of her gloves, "to my child's acceptance of the proffered attentions of Mrs. Boffin, I interpose no objection."

Here Miss Bella offered the remonstrance: "Don't talk nonsense, ma, please."

"Peace!" said Mrs. Wilfer.

"No, ma, I am not going to be made so absurd. Interposing objections!"

"I say," repeated Mrs. Wilfer, with a vast access of grandeur, "that I am *not* going to interpose objections. If Mrs. Boffin (to whose countenance no disciple of Lavater could possibly for a single moment subscribe)," with a shiver, "seeks to illuminate her new residence in town with the attractions of a child of mine, I am content that she should be favored by the company of a child of mine."

"You use the word, ma'am, I have myself used," said Rokesmith, with a glance at Bella, "when you speak of Miss Wilfer's attractions there."

"Pardon me," returned Mrs. Wilfer with dreadful solemnity, "but I had not finished."

"Pray excuse me."

"I was about to say," pursued Mrs. Wilfer, who clearly had not had the faintest idea of saying anything more, "that when I use the term attractions, I do so with the qualification that I do not mean it in any way whatever."

The excellent lady delivered this luminous elucidation of her views with an air of greatly obliging her hearers, and greatly distinguishing herself. Whereat Miss Bella laughed a scornful little laugh, and said, —

"Quite enough about this, I am sure, on all sides. Have the goodness, Mr. Rokesmith, to give my love to Mrs. Boffin" —

"Pardon me!" cried Mrs. Wilfer. "Compliments."

"Love!" repeated Bella, with a little stamp of her foot.

"No!" said Mrs. Wilfer, monotonously. "Compliments."

("Say Miss Wilfer's love, and Mrs. Wilfer's com-

plimentş," the Secretary proposed, as a compromise.)

"And I shall be very glad to come when she is ready for me. The sooner, the better."

"One last word, Bella," said Mrs. Wilfer, "before descending to the family apartment. I trust that, as a child of mine, you will ever be sensible that it will be graceful in you, when associating with Mr. and Mrs. Boffin upon equal terms, to remember that the Secretary, Mr. Rokesmith, as your father's lodger, has a claim on your good word."

The condescension with which Mrs. Wilfer delivered this proclamation of patronage was as wonderful as the swiftness with which the lodger had lost caste in the Secretary. He smiled as the mother retired down-stairs; but his face fell as the daughter followed.

"So insolent, so trivial, so capricious, so mercenary, so careless, so hard to touch, so hard to turn!" he said bitterly.

And added, as he went upstairs, "And yet so pretty, so pretty!"

And added presently, as he walked to and fro in his room, "And if she knew!"

She knew that he was shaking the house by his walking to and fro; and she declared it another of the miseries of being poor, that you couldn't get rid of a haunting Secretary, stump — stump — stumping overhead in the dark, like a Ghost.

CHAPTER XVII.

A DISMAL SWAMP.

And now, in the blooming summer days, behold Mr. and Mrs. Boffin established in the eminently aristocratic family mansion, and behold all manner of crawling, creeping, fluttering, and buzzing creatures, attracted by the gold dust of the Golden Dustman!

Foremost among those leaving cards at the eminently aristocratic door before it is quite painted are the Veneerings; out of breath, one might imagine, from the impetuosity of their rush to the eminently aristocratic steps. One copperplate Mrs. Veneering, two copperplate Mr. Veneerings, and a connubial copperplate Mr. and Mrs. Veneering, requesting the honor of Mr. and Mrs. Boffin's company at dinner with the utmost Analytical solemnities. The enchanting Lady Tippins leaves a card. Twemlow leaves cards. A tall, custard-colored phaeton, tooling up in a solemn manner, leaves four cards, to wit, a couple of Mr. Podsnaps, a Mrs. Podsnap, and a Miss Podsnap. All the world and his wife and daughter leave cards. Sometimes the world's wife has so many daughters, that her card reads rather like a Miscellaneous Lot at an

Auction; comprising Mrs. Tapkins, Miss Tapkins, Miss Frederica Tapkins, Miss Antonina Tapkins, Miss Malvina Tapkins, and Miss Euphemia Tapkins; at the same time, the same lady leaves the card of Mrs. Henry George Alfred Swoshle, *née* Tapkins; also a card, Mrs. Tapkins at Home, Wednesdays, Music, Portland Place.

Miss Bella Wilfer becomes an inmate, for an indefinite period, of the eminently aristocratic dwelling. Mrs. Boffin bears Miss Bella away to her Milliner's and Dressmaker's, and she gets beautifully dressed. The Veneerings find with swift remorse that they have omitted to invite Miss Bella Wilfer. One Mrs. Veneering and one Mr. and Mrs. Veneering, requesting that additional honor, instantly do penance in white cardboard on the hall table. Mrs. Tapkins likewise discovers her omission, and with promptitude repairs it; for herself, for Miss Tapkins, for Miss Frederica Tapkins, for Miss Antonina Tapkins, for Miss Malvina Tapkins, and for Miss Euphemia Tapkins. Likewise, for Mrs. Henry George Alfred Swoshle, *née* Tapkins. Likewise, for Mrs. Tapkins at Home, Wednesdays, Music, Portland Place.

Tradesmen's books hunger, and tradesmen's mouths water, for the gold dust of the Golden Dustman. As Mrs. Boffin and Miss Wilfer drive out, or as Mr. Boffin walks out at his jog-trot pace, the fishmonger pulls off his hat with an air of reverence founded on conviction. His men cleanse their fingers on their woollen aprons before presuming to touch their foreheads to Mr. Boffin or Lady. The gaping salmon and the golden mullet lying on the slab seem to turn up their eyes sideways, as they would turn up their hands if they had any, in

worshipping admiration. The butcher, though a portly and a prosperous man, doesn't know what to do with himself, so anxious is he to express humility when discovered by the passing Boffins taking the air in a mutton grove. Presents are made to the Boffin servants, and bland strangers with business cards, meeting said servants in the street, offer hypothetical corruption. As, "Supposing I was to be favored with an order from Mr. Boffin, my dear friend, it would be worth my while" — to do a certain thing that I hope might not prove wholly disagreeable to your feelings.

But no one knows so well as the Secretary, who opens and reads the letters, what a set is made at the man marked by a stroke of notoriety. Oh the varieties of dust for ocular use, offered in exchange for the gold dust of the Golden Dustman! Fifty-seven churches to be erected with half-crowns, forty-two parsonage-houses to be repaired with shillings, seven-and-twenty organs to be built with halfpence, twelve hundred children to be brought up on postage stamps. Not that a half-crown, shilling or halfpenny, or postage stamp would be particularly acceptable from Mr. Boffin, but that it is so obvious he is the man to make up the deficiency. And then the charities, my Christian brother! And mostly in difficulties, yet mostly lavish, too, in the expensive articles of print and paper. Large fat private double letter, sealed with ducal coronet. "Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire. My dear Sir, — Having consented to preside at the forthcoming Annual Dinner of the Family Party Fund, and feeling deeply impressed with the immense usefulness of that noble Institution, and the great importance of its being supported

by a List of Stewards that shall prove to the public the interest taken in it by popular and distinguished men, I have undertaken to ask you to become a Steward on that occasion. Soliciting your favorable reply before the 14th instant, I am, My dear Sir, Your faithful Servant, LINSEED. P.S. The Steward's fee is limited to Three Guineas." Friendly, this, on the part of the Duke of Linseed (and thoughtful in the postscript), only lithographed by the hundred, and presenting but a pale individuality of address to Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire, in quite another hand. It takes two noble Earls and a Viscount, combined, to inform Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire, in an equally flattering manner, that an estimable lady in the West of England has offered to present a purse containing twenty pounds to the Society for Granting Annuities to Unassuming Members of the Middle Classes, if twenty individuals will previously present purses of one hundred pounds each. And those benevolent noblemen very kindly point out that if Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire, should wish to present two or more purses, it will not be inconsistent with the design of the estimable lady in the West of England, provided each purse be coupled with the name of some member of his honored and respected family.

These are the corporate beggars. But there are, besides, the individual beggars; and how does the heart of the Secretary fail him when he has to cope with *them!* And they must be coped with to some extent, because they all enclose documents (they call their scraps documents; but they are, as to papers deserving the name, what minced veal is to a calf), the non-return of which would be their

ruin. That is to say, they are utterly ruined now, but they would be more utterly ruined then. Among these correspondents are several daughters of general officers, long accustomed to every luxury of life (except spelling), who little thought, when their gallant fathers waged war in the Peninsula, that they would ever have to appeal to those whom Providence, in its inscrutable wisdom, has blessed with untold gold, and from among whom they select the name of Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire, for a maiden effort in this wise, understanding that he has such a heart as never was. The Secretary learns, too, that confidence between man and wife would seem to obtain but rarely when virtue is in distress, so numerous are the wives who take up their pens to ask Mr. Boffin for money without the knowledge of their devoted husbands, who would never permit it; while, on the other hand, so numerous are the husbands who take up their pens to ask Mr. Boffin for money without the knowledge of their devoted wives, who would instantly go out of their senses if they had the least suspicion of the circumstance. There are the inspired beggars, too. These were sitting, only yesterday evening, musing over a fragment of candle which must soon go out and leave them in the dark for the rest of their nights, when surely some Angel whispered the name of Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire, to their souls, imparting rays of hope, nay confidence, to which they had long been strangers! Akin to these are the suggestively-befriended beggars. They were partaking of a cold potato and water by the flickering and gloomy light of a lucifer match, in their lodgings (rent considerably in arrear, and heartless

landlady threatening expulsion "like a dog" into the streets), when a gifted friend, happening to look in, said, "Write immediately to Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire," and would take no denial. There are the nobly independent beggars, too. These, in the days of their abundance, ever regarded gold as dross, and have not yet got over that only impediment in the way of their amassing wealth, but they want no dross from Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire. No, Mr. Boffin; the world may term it pride, paltry pride if you will, but they wouldn't take it if you offered it; a loan, sir — for fourteen weeks to the day, interest calculated at the rate of five per cent. per annum, to be bestowed upon any charitable institution you may name — is all they want of you, and if you have the meanness to refuse it, count on being despised by these great spirits. There are the beggars of punctual business habits, too. These will make an end of themselves at a quarter to one P.M. on Tuesday, if no Post-Office order is in the interim received from Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire: arriving after a quarter to one P.M. on Tuesday, it need not be sent, as they will then (having made an exact memorandum of the heartless circumstances) be "cold in death." There are the beggars on horseback, too, in another sense from the sense of the proverb. These are mounted and ready to start on the highway to affluence. The goal is before them, the road is in the best condition, their spurs are on, the steed is willing, but, at the last moment, for want of some special thing — a clock, a violin, an astronomical telescope, an electrifying machine — they must dismount forever, unless they receive its equivalent in money from Nicodemus

Boffin, Esquire. Less given to detail are the beggars who make sporting ventures. These, usually to be addressed in reply under initials at a country post-office, inquire in feminine hands, Dare one who cannot disclose herself to Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire, but whose name might startle him were it revealed, solicit the immediate advance of two hundred pounds from unexpected riches exercising their noblest privilege in the trust of a common humanity?

In such a Dismal Swamp does the new house stand, and through it does the Secretary daily struggle breast high. Not to mention all the people alive who have made inventions that won't act, and all the jobbers who job in all the jobberies jobbed; though these may be regarded as the Alligators of the Dismal Swamp, and are always lying by to drag the Golden Dustman under.

But the old house. There are no designs against the Golden Dustman there? There are no fish of the shark tribe in the Bower Waters? Perhaps not. Still, Wegg is established there, and would seem, judged by his secret proceedings, to cherish a notion of making a discovery. For, when a man with a wooden leg lies prone on his stomach to peep under bedsteads; and hops up ladders, like some extinct bird, to survey the tops of presses and cupboards; and provides himself an iron rod, which he is always poking and prodding into dust mounds; the probability is that he expects to find something.

BOOK THE SECOND.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER.

CHAPTER I.

OF AN EDUCATIONAL CHARACTER.

The school at which young Charley Hexam had first learned from a book — the streets being, for pupils of his degree, the great Preparatory Establishment in which very much that is never unlearned is learned without and before book — was a miserable loft in an unsavory yard. Its atmosphere was oppressive and disagreeable; it was crowded, noisy, and confusing; half the pupils dropped asleep, or fell into a state of waking stupefaction; the other half kept them in either condition by maintaining a monotonous droning noise, as if they were performing, out of time and tune, on a ruder sort of bagpipe. The teachers, animated solely by good intentions, had no idea of execution, and a lamentable jumble was the upshot of their kind endeavors.

It was a school for all ages, and for both sexes. The latter were kept apart, and the former were partitioned off into square assortments. But, all the place was pervaded by a grimly ludicrous pretence, that every pupil was childish and innocent.

This pretence, much favored by the lady visitors, led to the ghastliest absurdities. Young women, old in the vices of the commonest and worst life, were expected to profess themselves enthralled by the good child's book, the Adventures of Little Margery, who resided in the village cottage by the mill; severely reproved and morally squashed the miller, when she was five and he was fifty; divided her porridge with singing birds; denied herself a new nankeen bonnet, on the ground that the turnips did not wear nankeen bonnets, neither did the sheep who ate them; who plaited straw, and delivered the dreariest orations to all comers, at all sorts of unseasonable times. So, unwieldy young dredgers and hulking mud-larks were referred to the experiences of Thomas Twopence, who, having resolved not to rob (under circumstances of uncommon atrocity) his particular friend and benefactor, of eighteen-pence, presently came into supernatural possession of three-and-sixpence, and lived a shining light ever afterwards. (Note, that the benefactor came to no good.) Several swaggering sinners had written their own biographies in the same strain; it always appearing, from the lessons of those very boastful persons, that you were to do good, not because it *was* good, but because you were to make a good thing of it. Contrariwise, the adult pupils were taught to read (if they could learn) out of the New Testament; and by dint of stumbling over the syllables, and keeping their bewildered eyes on the particular syllables coming round to their turn, were as absolutely ignorant of the sublime history as if they had never seen or heard of it. An exceedingly and confoundingly perplexing jumble of a school, in fact,

where black spirits and gray, red spirits and white, jumbled jumbled jumbled jumbled, jumbled every night. And particularly every Sunday night. For then, an inclined plane of unfortunate infants would be handed over to the prosiest and worst of all the teachers with good intentions, whom nobody older would endure. Who, taking his stand on the floor before them as chief executioner, would be attended by a conventional volunteer boy as executioner's assistant. When and where it first became the conventional system that a weary or inattentive infant in a class must have its face smoothed downward with a hot hand, or when and where the conventional volunteer boy first beheld such system in operation, and became inflamed with a sacred zeal to administer it, matters not. It was the function of the chief executioner to hold forth, and it was the function of the acolyte to dart at sleeping infants, yawning infants, restless infants, whimpering infants, and smooth their wretched faces; sometimes with one hand, as if he were anointing them for a whisker; sometimes with both hands, applied after the fashion of blinkers. And so the jumble would be in action in this department for a mortal hour; the exponent drawling on to My Dearerr Childerrenerr, let us say, for example, about the beautiful coming to the Sepulchre; and repeating the word Sepulchre (commonly used among infants) five hundred times, and never once hinting what it meant; the conventional boy smoothing away right and left, as an infallible commentary; the whole hotbed of flushed and exhausted infants exchanging measles, rashes, whooping-cough, fever, and stomach disorders, as if they were assembled in High Market for the purpose.

Even in this temple of good intentions, an exceptionally sharp boy, exceptionally determined to learn, could learn something, and, having learned it, could impart it much better than the teachers; as being more knowing than they, and not at the disadvantage in which they stood towards the shrewder pupils. In this way it had come about that Charley Hexam had risen in the jumble, taught in the jumble, and been received from the jumble into a better school.

"So you want to go and see your sister, Hexam?"

"If you please, Mr. Headstone."

"I have half a mind to go with you. Where does your sister live?"

"Why, she is not settled yet, Mr. Headstone. I'd rather you didn't see her till she is settled, if it was all the same to you."

"Look here, Hexam." Mr. Bradley Headstone, highly certificated stipendiary schoolmaster, drew his right forefinger through one of the button-holes of the boy's coat, and looked at it attentively. "I hope your sister may be good company for you?"

"Why do you doubt it, Mr. Headstone?"

"I did not say I doubted it."

"No, sir; you didn't say so."

Bradley Headstone looked at his finger again, took it out of the button-hole and looked at it closer, bit the side of it, and looked at it again.

"You see, Hexam, you will be one of us. In good time you are sure to pass a creditable examination, and become one of us. Then the question is"—

The boy waited so long for the question, while the schoolmaster looked at a new side of his finger,

bit it, and looked at it again, that at length the boy repeated: —

"The question is, sir — ?"

"Whether you had not better leave well alone."

"Is it well to leave my sister alone, Mr. Headstone?"

"I do not say so, because I do not know. I put it to you. I ask you to think of it. I want you to consider. You know how well you are doing here."

"After all, she got me here," said the boy with a struggle.

"Perceiving the necessity of it," acquiesced the schoolmaster, "and making up her mind fully to the separation. Yes."

The boy, with a return of that former reluctance or struggle, or whatever it was, seemed to debate with himself. At length he said, raising his eyes to his master's face: —

"I wish you'd come with me and see her, Mr. Headstone, though she is not settled. I wish you'd come with me, and take her in the rough, and judge her for yourself."

"You are sure you would not like," asked the schoolmaster, "to prepare her?"

"My sister Lizzie," said the boy proudly, "wants no preparing, Mr. Headstone. What she is, she is, and shows herself to be. There's no pretending about my sister."

His confidence in her sat more easily upon him than the indecision with which he had twice contended. It was his better nature to be true to her, if it were his worse nature to be wholly selfish. And as yet the better nature had the stronger hold.

"Well, I can spare the evening," said the schoolmaster. "I am ready to walk with you."

"Thank you, Mr. Headstone. And I am ready to go."

Bradley Headstone, in his decent black coat and waistcoat, and decent white shirt, and decent formal black tie, and decent pantaloons of pepper-and-salt, with his decent silver watch in his pocket, and its decent hair guard round his neck, looked a thoroughly decent young man of six and twenty. He was never seen in any other dress, and yet there was a certain stiffness in his manner of wearing this, as if there were a want of adaptation between him and it, recalling some mechanics in their holiday clothes. He had acquired mechanically a great store of teacher's knowledge. He could do mental arithmetic mechanically, sing at sight mechanically, blow various wind instruments mechanically, even play the great church organ mechanically. From his early childhood up, his mind had been a place of mechanical stowage. The arrangement of his wholesale warehouse, so that it might be always ready to meet the demands of retail dealers — history here, geography there, astronomy to the right, political economy to the left — natural history, the physical sciences, figures, music, the lower mathematics, and what not, all in their several places — this care had imparted to his countenance a look of care; while the habit of questioning and being questioned had given him a suspicious manner, or a manner that would be better described as one of lying in wait. There was a kind of settled trouble in the face. It was the face belonging to a naturally slow or inattentive intellect, that had toiled

hard to get what it had won, and that had to hold it now that it was gotten. He always seemed to be uneasy lest anything should be missing from his mental warehouse, and taking stock to assure himself.

Suppression of so much to make room for so much had given him a constrained manner, over and above. Yet there was enough of what was animal, and of what was fiery (though smouldering), still visible in him, to suggest that if young Bradley Headstone, when a pauper lad, had chanced to be told off for the sea, he would not have been the last man in a ship's crew. Regarding that origin of his he was proud, moody, and sullen, desiring it to be forgotten. And few people knew of it.

In some visits to the Jumble his attention had been attracted to this boy Hexam. An undeniable boy for a pupil teacher; an undeniable boy to do credit to the master who should bring him on. Combined with this consideration, there may have been some thought of the pauper lad now never to be mentioned. Be that how it might, he had with pains gradually worked the boy into his own school, and procured him some offices to discharge there, which were repaid with food and lodging. Such were the circumstances that had brought together Bradley Headstone and young Charley Hexam that autumn evening. Autumn, because full half a year had come and gone since the bird of prey lay dead upon the river-shore.

The schools — for they were twofold, as the sexes — were down in that district of the flat country tending to the Thames, where Kent and Surrey meet, and where the railways still bestride

the market gardens that will soon die under them. The schools were newly built, and there were so many like them all over the country, that one might have thought the whole were but one restless edifice, with the locomotive gift of Aladdin's palace. They were in a neighborhood which looked like a toy neighborhood, taken in blocks out of a box by a child of particularly incoherent mind, and set up anyhow; here, one side of a new street; there, a large solitary public-house facing nowhere; here, another unfinished street already in ruins; there, a church; here, an immense new warehouse; there, a dilapidated old country villa; then, a medley of black ditch, sparkling cucumber frame, rank field, richly-cultivated kitchen garden, brick viaduct, arch-spanned canal, and disorder of frouziness and fog. As if the child had given the table a kick, and gone to sleep.

But, even among school buildings, school teachers, and school pupils, all according to pattern, and all engendered in the light of the latest Gospel according to Monotony, the older pattern, into which so many fortunes have been shaped for good and evil, comes out. It came out in Miss Peecher the schoolmistress, watering her flowers, as Mr. Bradley Headstone walked forth. It came out in Miss Peecher the schoolmistress, watering the flowers in the little dusty bit of garden attached to her small official residence, with little windows like the eyes in needles, and little doors like the covers of schoolbooks.

Small, shining, neat, methodical, and buxom was Miss Peecher; cherry-cheeked, and tuneful of voice. A little pincushion, a little housewife, a little book,

a little workbox, a little set of tables and weights and measures, and a little woman, all in one. She could write a little essay on any subject, exactly a slate long, beginning at the left-hand top of one side and ending at the right-hand bottom of the other, and the essay should be strictly according to rule. If Mr. Bradley Headstone had addressed a written proposal of marriage to her, she would probably have replied in a complete little essay on the theme exactly a slate long, but would certainly have replied Yes. For she loved him. The decent hair guard that went round his neck, and took care of his decent silver watch, was an object of envy to her. So would Miss Peecher have gone round his neck, and taken care of him. Of him, insensible. Because he did not love Miss Peecher.

Miss Peecher's favorite pupil, who assisted her in her little household, was in attendance with a can of water to replenish her little watering-pot, and sufficiently divined the state of Miss Peecher's affections to feel it necessary that she herself should love young Charley Hexam. So, there was a double palpitation among the double stocks and double wallflowers when the master and the boy looked over the little gate.

"A fine evening, Miss Peecher," said the master.

"A very fine evening, Mr. Headstone," said Miss Peecher. "Are you taking a walk?"

"Hexam and I are going to take a long walk."

"Charming weather," remarked Miss Peecher, "*for* a long walk."

"Ours is rather on business than mere pleasure," said the master.

Miss Peecher inverting her watering-pot, and very

carefully shaking out the few last drops over a flower, as if there were some special virtue in them which would make it a Jack's beanstalk before morning, called for replenishment to her pupil, who had been speaking to the boy.

"Good-night, Miss Peecher," said the master.

"Good-night, Mr. Headstone," said the mistress.

The pupil had been, in her state of pupilage, so imbued with the class-custom of stretching out an arm, as if to hail a cab or omnibus, whenever she found she had an observation on hand to offer to Miss Peecher, that she often did it in their domestic relations; and she did it now.

"Well, Mary Anne?" said Miss Peecher.

"If you please, ma'am, Hexam said they were going to see his sister."

"But that can't be, I think," returned Miss Peecher: "because Mr. Headstone can have no business with *her*."

Mary Anne again hailed.

"Well, Mary Anne?"

"If you please, ma'am, perhaps it's Hexam's business?"

"That may be," said Miss Peecher. "I didn't think of that. Not that it matters at all."

Mary Anne again hailed.

"Well, Mary Anne?"

"They say she's very handsome."

"Oh, Mary Anne, Mary Anne!" returned Miss Peecher, slightly coloring and shaking her head, a little out of humor; "how often have I told you not to use that vague expression, not to speak in that general way? When you say *they* say, what do you mean? Part of speech They?"

Mary Anne hooked her right arm behind her in her left hand, as being under examination, and replied, —

"Personal pronoun."

"Person, They?"

"Third person."

"Number, They?"

"Plural number."

"Then how many do you mean, Mary Anne? Two? Or more?"

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," said Mary Anne, disconcerted now she came to think of it; "but I don't know that I mean more than her brother himself." As she said it she unhooked her arm.

"I felt convinced of it," returned Miss Peecher, smiling again. "Now pray, Mary Anne, be careful another time. He says is very different from they say, remember. Difference between he says and they say? Give it me."

Mary Anne immediately hooked her right arm behind her in her left hand — an attitude absolutely necessary to the situation — and replied: "One is indicative mood, present tense, third person singular, verb active to say. Other is indicative mood, present tense, third person plural, verb active to say."

"Why verb active, Mary Anne?"

"Because it takes a pronoun after it in the objective case, Miss Peecher."

"Very good indeed," remarked Miss Peecher with encouragement. "In fact, could not be better. Don't forget to apply it another time, Mary Anne." This said, Miss Peecher finished the watering of her flowers, and went into her little official residence, and took a refresher of the principal rivers and

mountains of the world, their breadths, depths, and heights, before settling the measurements of the body of a dress for her own personal occupation.

Bradley Headstone and Charley Hexam duly got to the Surrey side of Westminster Bridge, and crossed the bridge, and made along the Middlesex shore towards Millbank. In this region are a certain little street, called Church Street, and a certain little blind square, called Smith Square, in the centre of which last retreat is a very hideous church with four towers at the four corners, generally resembling some petrified monster, frightful and gigantic, on its back, with its legs in the air. They found a tree near by in a corner, and a blacksmith's forge, and a timber-yard, and a dealer's in old iron. What a rusty portion of a boiler and a great iron wheel or so meant by lying half buried in the dealer's fore-court, nobody seemed to know or to want to know. Like the Miller of questionable jollity in the song, They cared for Nobody, no, not they, and Nobody cared for them.

After making the round of this place, and noting that there was a deadly kind of repose on it, more as though it had taken laudanum than fallen into a natural rest, they stopped at the point where the street and the square joined, and where there were some little quiet houses in a row. To these Charley Hexam finally led the way, and at one of these stopped.

"This must be where my sister lives, sir. This is where she came for a temporary lodging, soon after father's death."

"How often have you seen her since?"

"Why, only twice, sir," returned the boy with his

former reluctance; "but that's as much her doing as mine."

"How does she support herself?"

"She was always a fair needlewoman, and she keeps the stock-room of a seaman's outfitter."

"Does she ever work at her own lodging here?"

"Sometimes; but her regular hours and regular occupation are at their place of business, I believe, sir. This is the number."

The boy knocked at a door, and the door promptly opened with a spring and a click. A parlor-door within a small entry stood open, and disclosed a child — a dwarf — a girl — a something — sitting on a little low, old-fashioned arm-chair, which had a kind of little working bench before it.

"I can't get up," said the child, "because my back's bad, and my legs are queer. But I'm the person of the house."

"Who else is at home?" asked Charley Hexam, staring.

"Nobody's at home at present," returned the child, with a glib assertion of her dignity, "except the person of the house. What did you want, young man?"

"I wanted to see my sister."

"Many young men have sisters," returned the child. "Give me your name, young man."

The queer little figure, and the queer but not ugly little face, with its bright gray eyes, were so sharp, that the sharpness of the manner seemed unavoidable. As if, being turned out of that mould, it must be sharp.

"Hexam is my name."

"Ah, indeed?" said the person of the house.

"I thought it might be. Your sister will be in in about a quarter of an hour. I am very fond of your sister. She's my particular friend. Take a seat. And this gentleman's name?"

"Mr. Headstone, my schoolmaster."

"Take a seat. And would you please to shut the street-door first? I can't very well do it myself, because my back's so bad, and my legs are so queer."

They complied in silence, and the little figure went on with its work of gumming or gluing together with a camel's-hair brush certain pieces of cardboard and thin wood, previously cut into various shapes. The scissors and knives upon the bench showed that the child herself had cut them; and the bright scraps of velvet and silk and ribbon also strewn upon the bench showed that, when duly stuffed (and stuffing too was there), she was to cover them smartly. The dexterity of her nimble fingers was remarkable, and, as she brought two thin edges accurately together by giving them a little bite, she would glance at the visitors out of the corners of her gray eyes with a look that out-sharpened all her other sharpness.

"You can't tell me the name of my trade, I'll be bound," she said, after taking several of these observations.

"You make pin-cushions," said Charley.

"What else do I make?"

"Pen-wipers," said Bradley Headstone.

"Ha! ha! What else do I make? You're a schoolmaster, but you can't tell me."

"You do something," he returned, pointing to a corner of the little bench, "with straw; but I don't know what."

"Well done, you!" cried the person of the

house. "I only make pin-cushions and pen-wipers, to use up my waste. But my straw really does belong to my business. Try again. What do I make with my straw?"

"Dinner mats?"

"A schoolmaster, and says dinner mats! I'll give you a clew to my trade, in a game of forfeits. I love my love with a B because she's Beautiful; I hate my love with a B because she is Brazen; I took her to the sign of the Blue Boar, and I treated her with Bonnets; her name's Bouncer, and she lives in Bedlam.—Now, what do I make with my straw?"

"Ladies' bonnets?"

"Fine ladies'," said the person of the house, nodding assent. "Dolls'. I'm a Doll's Dressmaker."

"I hope it's a good business?"

The person of the house shrugged her shoulders and shook her head. "No. Poorly paid. And I'm often so pressed for time! I had a doll married last week, and was obliged to work all night. And it's not good for me, on account of my back being so bad, and my legs so queer."

They looked at the little creature with a wonder that did not diminish, and the schoolmaster said: "I am sorry your fine ladies are so inconsiderate."

"It's the way with them," said the person of the house, shrugging her shoulders again. "And they take no care of their clothes, and they never keep to the same fashions a month. I work for a doll with three daughters. Bless you, she's enough to ruin her husband!"

The person of the house gave a weird little laugh here, and gave them another look out of the corners of her eyes. She had an elfin chin that was capable of great expression; and, whenever she gave this look, she hitched this chin up. As if her eyes and her chin worked together on the same wires.

"Are you always as busy as you are now?"

"Busier. I'm slack just now. I finished a large mourning order the day before yesterday. Doll I worked for lost a canary bird." The person of the house gave another little laugh, and then nodded her head several times, as who should moralize, "Oh this world, this world!"

"Are you alone all day?" asked Bradley Headstone. "Don't any of the neighboring children—?"

"Ah, lud!" cried the person of the house with a little scream, as if the word had pricked her. "Don't talk of children. I can't bear children. *I* know their tricks and their manners." She said this with an angry little shake of her right fist close before her eyes.

Perhaps it scarcely required the teacher habit to perceive that the doll's dressmaker was inclined to be bitter on the difference between herself and other children. But both master and pupil understood it so.

"Always running about and screeching, always playing and fighting, always skip-skip-skipping on the pavement, and chalking it for their games. Oh! *I* know their tricks and their manners!" Shaking the little fist as before. "And that's not all. Ever so often calling names in through a person's keyhole, and imitating a person's back and legs. Oh! *I* know their tricks and their manners. And I'll

tell you what I'd do to punish 'em. There's doors under the church in the square — black doors, leading into black vaults. Well! I'd open one of those doors, and I'd cram 'em all in, and then I'd lock the door, and through the keyhole I'd blow in pepper."

"What would be the good of blowing in pepper?" asked Charley Hexam.

"To set 'em sneezing," said the person of the house, "and make their eyes water. And when they were all sneezing and inflamed, I'd mock 'em through the keyhole. Just as they, with their tricks and their manners, mock a person through a person's keyhole!"

An uncommonly emphatic shake of her little fist close before her eyes seemed to ease the mind of the person of the house; for she added with recovered composure, "No, no, no. No children for me. Give me grown-ups."

It was difficult to guess the age of this strange creature, for her poor figure furnished no clew to it, and her face was at once so young and so old. Twelve, or at the most thirteen, might be near the mark.

"I always did like grown-ups," she went on, "and always kept company with them. So sensible. Sit so quiet. Don't go prancing and capering about! And I mean always to keep among none but grown-ups till I marry. I suppose I must make up my mind to marry, one of these days."

She listened to a step outside that caught her ear, and there was a soft knock at the door. Pulling at a handle within her reach, she said, with a pleased laugh: "Now here, for instance, is a grown-up that's

my particular friend!" and Lizzie Hexam in a black dress entered the room.

"Charley! You!"

Taking him to her arms in the old way — of which he seemed a little ashamed — she saw no one else.

"There, there, there, Liz, all right, my dear. See! Here's Mr. Headstone come with me."

Her eyes met those of the schoolmaster, who had evidently expected to see a very different sort of person, and a murmured word or two of salutation passed between them. She was a little flurried by the unexpected visit, and the schoolmaster was not at his ease. But he never was quiet.

"I told Mr. Headstone you were not settled, Liz, but he was so kind as to take an interest in coming, and so I brought him. How well you look!"

Bradley seemed to think so.

"Ah! Don't she, don't she?" cried the person of the house, resuming her occupation, though the twilight was falling fast. "I believe you, she does! But go on with your chat, one and all: —

'You one two three,
My com-pa-nie,
And don't mind me,'"

— pointing this impromptu rhyme with three points of her thin forefinger.

"I didn't expect a visit from you, Charley," said his sister. "I supposed that if you wanted to see me you would have sent to me, appointing me to come somewhere near the school, as I did last time. I saw my brother near the school, sir," to Bradley Headstone, "because it's easier for me to go there

than for him to come here. I work about midway between the two places."

"You don't see much of one another," said Bradley, not improving in respect of ease.

"No." With a rather sad shake of her head. "Charley always does well, Mr. Headstone?"

"He could not do better. I regard his course as quite plain before him."

"I hoped so. I am so thankful. So well done of you, Charley dear! It is better for me not to come (except when he wants me) between him and his prospects. You think so, Mr. Headstone?"

Conscious that his pupil teacher was looking for his answer, and that he himself had suggested the boy's keeping aloof from this sister, now seen for the first time face to face, Bradley Headstone stammered:—

"Your brother is very much occupied, you know. He has to work hard. One cannot but say that the less his attention is diverted from his work, the better for his future. When he shall have established himself, why, then — it will be another thing then."

Lizzie shook her head again, and returned, with a quiet smile: "I always advised him as you advise him. Did I not, Charley?"

"Well, never mind that now," said the boy. "How are you getting on?"

"Very well, Charley. I want for nothing."

"You have your own room here?"

"Oh yes! Upstairs. And it's quiet, and pleasant, and airy."

"And she always has the use of this room for visitors," said the person of the house, screwing up

one of her little bony fists like an opera-glass, and looking through it, with her eyes and her chin in that quaint accordance. "Always this room for visitors; haven't you, Lizzie dear?"

It happened that Bradley Headstone noticed a very slight action of Lizzie Hexam's hand, as though it checked the doll's dressmaker. And it happened that the latter noticed him in the same instant; for she made a double eyeglass of her two hands, looked at him through it, and cried, with a waggish shake of her head: "Aha! Caught you spying, did I?"

It might have fallen out so, anyway; but Bradley Headstone also noticed that immediately after this, Lizzie, who had not taken off her bonnet, rather hurriedly proposed that, as the room was getting dark, they should go out into the air. They went out; the visitors saying good-night to the doll's dressmaker, whom they left, leaning back in her chair with her arms crossed, singing to herself in a sweet thoughtful little voice.

"I'll saunter on by the river," said Bradley. "You will be glad to talk together."

As his uneasy figure went on before them among the evening shadows, the boy said to his sister petulantly: —

"When are you going to settle yourself in some Christian sort of place, Liz? I thought you were going to do it before now."

"I am very well where I am, Charley."

"Very well where you are! I am ashamed to have brought Mr. Headstone with me. How came you to get into such company as that little witch's?"

"By chance at first, as it seemed, Charley. But I think it must have been by something more than

chance, for that child — You remember the bills upon the walls at home?"

"Confound the bills upon the walls at home! I want to forget the bills upon the walls at home, and it would be better for you to do the same," grumbled the boy. "Well; what of them?"

"This child is the grandchild of the old man."

"What old man?"

"The terrible drunken old man, in the list slippers and the nightcap."

The boy asked, rubbing his nose in a manner that half expressed vexation at hearing so much, and half curiosity to hear more: "How came you to make that out? What a girl you are!"

"The child's father is employed by the house that employs me; that's how I came to know it, Charley. The father is like his own father, a weak, wretched, trembling creature, falling to pieces, never sober. But a good workman, too, at the work he does. The mother is dead. This poor ailing little creature has come to be what she is, surrounded by drunken people from her cradle — if she ever had one, Charley."

"I don't see what you have to do with her, for all that," said the boy.

"Don't you, Charley?"

The boy looked doggedly at the river. They were at Millbank, and the river rolled on their left. His sister gently touched him on the shoulder, and pointed to it.

"Any compensation — restitution — never mind the word, you know my meaning. Father's grave."

But he did not respond with any tenderness. After a moody silence he broke out, in an ill-used tone: —

"It'll be a very hard thing, Liz, if, when I am trying my best to get up in the world, you pull me back."

"I, Charley?"

"Yes, you, Liz. Why can't you let bygones be bygones? Why can't you, as Mr. Headstone said to me this very evening about another matter, leave well alone? What we have got to do is, to turn our faces full in our new direction, and keep straight on."

"And never look back? Not even to try to make some amends?"

"You are such a dreamer," said the boy with his former petulance. "It was all very well when we sat before the fire — when we looked into the hollow down by the flare — but we are looking into the real world now."

"Ah, we were looking into the real world then, Charley."

"I understand what you mean by that, but you are not justified in it. I don't want, as I raise myself, to shake you off, Liz. I want to carry you up with me. That's what I want to do, and mean to do. I know what I owe you. I said to Mr. Headstone this very evening, 'After all, my sister got me here.' Well, then. Don't pull me back, and hold me down. That's all I ask, and surely that's not unconscionable."

She had kept a steadfast look upon him, and she answered with composure: —

"I am not here selfishly, Charley. To please myself, I could not be too far from that river."

"Nor could you be too far from it to please me. Let us get quit of it equally. Why should you

linger about it any more than I? I give it a wide berth."

"I can't get away from it, I think," said Lizzie, passing her hand across her forehead. "It's no purpose of mine that I live by it still."

"There you go, Liz! Dreaming again! You lodge yourself of your own accord in a house with a drunken — tailor, I suppose — or something of the sort, and a little crooked antic of a child, or old person, or whatever it is, and then you talk as if you were drawn or driven there. Now, do be more practical."

She had been practical enough with him, in suffering and striving for him; but she only laid her hand upon his shoulder — not reproachfully — and tapped it twice or thrice. She had been used to do so, to soothe him when she carried him about, a child as heavy as herself. Tears started to his eyes.

"Upon my word, Liz," drawing the back of his hand across them, "I mean to be a good brother to you, and to prove that I know what I owe you. All I say is, that I hope you'll control your fancies a little, on my account. I'll get a school, and then you must come and live with me, and you'll have to control your fancies then, so why not now? Now, say I haven't vexed you."

"You haven't, Charley, you haven't."

"And say I haven't hurt you."

"You haven't, Charley." But this answer was less ready.

"Say you are sure I didn't mean to. Come! There's Mr. Headstone stopping and looking over the wall at the tide, to hint that it's time to go. Kiss me, and tell me that you know I didn't mean to hurt you."

She told him so, and they embraced, and walked on and came up with the schoolmaster.

"But we go your sister's way," he remarked when the boy told him he was ready. And with his cumbrous and uneasy action he stiffly offered her his arm. Her hand was just within it, when she drew it back. He looked round with a start, as if he thought she had detected something that repelled her in the momentary touch.

"I will not go in just yet," said Lizzie. "And you have a distance before you, and will walk faster without me."

Being by this time close to Vauxhall Bridge, they resolved, in consequence, to take that way over the Thames, and they left her; Bradley Headstone giving her his hand at parting, and she thanking him for his care of her brother.

The master and the pupil walked on rapidly and silently. They had nearly crossed the bridge, when a gentleman came coolly sauntering towards them, with a cigar in his mouth, his coat thrown back, and his hands behind him. Something in the careless manner of this person, and in a certain lazily arrogant air with which he approached, holding possession of twice as much pavement as another would have claimed, instantly caught the boy's attention. As the gentleman passed, the boy looked at him narrowly, and then stood still, looking after him.

"Who is that you stare after?" asked Bradley.

"Why!" said the boy with a confused and pondering frown upon his face, "it *is* that Wrayburn one!"

Bradley Headstone scrutinized the boy as closely as the boy had scrutinized the gentleman.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Headstone, but I couldn't help wondering what in the world brought *him* here!"

Though he said it as if his wonder were past—at the same time resuming the walk—it was not lost upon the master that he looked over his shoulder after speaking, and that the same perplexed and pondering frown was heavy on his face.

"You don't appear to like your friend, Hexam?"

"I DON'T like him," said the boy.

"Why not?"

"He took hold of me by the chin in a precious impertinent way, the first time I ever saw him," said the boy.

"Again why?"

"For nothing. Or—it's much the same—because something I happened to say about my sister didn't happen to please him."

"Then he knows your sister?"

"He didn't at that time," said the boy, still moodily pondering.

"Does now?"

The boy had so lost himself that he looked at Mr. Bradley Headstone as they walked on side by side, without attempting to reply until the question had been repeated; then he nodded and answered "Yes, sir."

"Going to see her, I dare say."

"It can't be!" said the boy quickly. "He doesn't know her well enough. I should like to catch him at it!"

When they had walked on for a time, more rapidly than before, the master said, clasping the pupil's arm between the elbow and the shoulder with his hand,—

"You were going to tell me something about that person. What did you say his name was?"

"Wrayburn. Mr. Eugene Wrayburn. He is what they call a barrister, with nothing to do. The first time he came to our old place was when my father was alive. He came on business; not that it was *his* business — *he* never had any business — he was brought by a friend of his."

"And the other times?"

"There was only one other time that I know of. When my father was killed by accident, he chanced to be one of the finders. He was mooning about, I suppose, taking liberties with people's chins; but there he was, somehow. He brought the news home to my sister early in the morning, and brought Miss Abbey Potterson, a neighbor, to help break it to her. He was mooning about the house when I was fetched home in the afternoon — they didn't know where to find me till my sister could be brought round sufficiently to tell them — and then he mooned away."

"And is that all?"

"That's all, sir."

Bradley Headstone gradually released the boy's arm, as if he were thoughtful, and they walked on side by side as before. After a long silence between them, Bradley resumed the talk.

"I suppose — your sister" — with a curious break both before and after the words — "has received hardly any teaching, Hexam?"

"Hardly any, sir."

"Sacrificed, no doubt, to her father's objections. I remember them in your case. Yet — your sister — scarcely looks or speaks like an ignorant person."

"Lizzie has as much thought as the best, Mr. Headstone. Too much, perhaps, without teaching. I used to call the fire at home her books, for she was always full of fancies — sometimes quite wise fancies, considering — when she sat looking at it."

"I don't like that," said Bradley Headstone.

His pupil was a little surprised by this striking in with so sudden and decided and emotional an objection, but took it as a proof of the master's interest in himself. It emboldened him to say, —

"I have never brought myself to mention it openly to you, Mr. Headstone, and you're my witness that I couldn't even make up my mind to take it from you before we came out to-night; but it's a painful thing to think that if I get on as well as you hope, I shall be — I won't say disgraced, because I don't mean disgraced — but — rather put to the blush if it was known — by a sister who has been very good to me."

"Yes," said Bradley Headstone in a slurring way, for his mind scarcely seemed to touch that point, so smoothly did it glide to another, "and there is this possibility to consider. Some man who had worked his way might come to admire — your sister — and might even in time bring himself to think of marrying — your sister — and it would be a sad drawback and a heavy penalty upon him, if, overcoming in his mind other inequalities of condition and other considerations against it, this inequality and this consideration remained in full force."

"That's much my own meaning, sir."

"Ay, ay," said Bradley Headstone, "but you spoke of a mere brother. Now, the case I have supposed would be a much stronger case; because

an admirer, a husband, would form the connection voluntarily, besides being obliged to proclaim it: which a brother is not. After all, you know, it must be said of you that you couldn't help yourself; while it would be said of him, with equal reason, that he could."

"That's true, sir. Sometimes, since Lizzie was left free by father's death, I have thought that such a young woman might soon acquire more than enough to pass muster. And sometimes I have even thought that perhaps Miss Peecher" —

"For the purpose, I would advise NOT Miss Peecher," Bradley Headstone struck in, with a recurrence of his late decision of manner.

"Would you be so kind as to think of it for me, Mr. Headstone?"

"Yes, Hexam, yes. I'll think of it. I'll think maturely of it. I'll think well of it."

Their walk was almost a silent one afterwards, until it ended at the schoolhouse. There, one of neat Miss Peecher's little windows, like the eyes in needles, was illuminated, and in a corner near it sat Mary Anne watching, while Miss Peecher at the table stitched at the neat little body she was making up by brown paper pattern for her own wearing. N. B. Miss Peecher and Miss Peecher's pupils were not much encouraged in the unscholastic art of needlework by Government.

Mary Anne, with her face to the window, held her arm up.

"Well, Mary Anne?"

"Mr. Headstone coming home, ma'am."

In about a minute Mary Anne again hailed.

"Yes, Mary Anne?"

"Gone in and locked his door, ma'am."

Miss Peecher repressed a sigh as she gathered her work together for bed, and transfixed that part of her dress where her heart would have been if she had had the dress on, with a sharp, sharp needle.

CHAPTER II.

STILL EDUCATIONAL.

THE person of the house, doll's dressmaker and manufacturer of ornamental pin-cushions and pen-wipers, sat in her quaint little low arm-chair, singing in the dark, until Lizzie came back. The person of the house had attained that dignity, while yet of very tender years indeed, through being the only trustworthy person *in* the house.

"Well, Lizzie-Mizzie-Wizzie," said she, breaking off in her song. "What's the news out of doors?"

"What's the news indoors?" returned Lizzie, playfully smoothing the bright long fair hair which grew very luxuriant and beautiful on the head of the doll's dressmaker.

"Let me see, said the blind man. Why, the last news is, that I don't mean to marry your brother."

"No?"

"No-o," shaking her head and her chin. "Don't like the boy."

"What do you say to his master?"

"I say that I think he's bespoke."

Lizzie finished putting the hair carefully back over the misshapen shoulders, and then lighted a candle. It showed the little parlor to be dingy, but

orderly and clean. She stood it on the mantel-shelf, remote from the dressmaker's eyes, and then put the room-door open, and the house-door open, and turned the little low chair and its occupant towards the outer air. It was a sultry night, and this was a fine-weather arrangement when the day's work was done. To complete it, she seated herself in a chair by the side of the little chair, and protectingly drew under her arm the spare hand that crept up to her.

"This is what your loving Jenny Wren calls the best time in the day and night," said the person of the house. Her real name was Fanny Cleaver; but she had long ago chosen to bestow upon herself the appellation of Miss Jenny Wren.

"I have been thinking," Jenny went on, "as I sat at work to-day, what a thing it would be if I should be able to have your company till I am married, or at least courted. Because, when I am courted, I shall make Him do some of the things that you do for me. He couldn't brush my hair like you do, or help me up and down stairs like you do, and he couldn't do anything like you do; but he could take my work home, and he could call for orders in his clumsy way. And he shall, too. *I'll* trot him about, I can tell him!"

Jenny Wren had her personal vanities — happily for her — and no intentions were stronger in her breast than the various trials and torments that were, in the fulness of time, to be inflicted upon "him."

"Wherever he may happen to be just at present, or whoever he may happen to be," said Miss Wren, "I know his tricks and his manners, and I give him warning to look out."

"Don't you think you are rather hard upon him?" asked her friend, smiling, and smoothing her hair.

"Not a bit," replied the sage Miss Wren, with an air of vast experience. "My dear, they don't care for you, those fellows, if you're *not* hard upon 'em. But I was saying, If I should be able to have your company. Ah! What a large If! Ain't it?"

"I have no intention of parting company, Jenny."

"Don't say that, or you'll go directly."

"Am I so little to be relied upon?"

"You're more to be relied upon than silver and gold." As she said it, Miss Wren suddenly broke off, screwed up her eyes and her chin, and looked prodigiously knowing. "Aha!

'Who comes here?
A Grenadier.
What does he want?
A pot of beer.'

And nothing else in the world, my dear."

A man's figure paused on the pavement at the outer door. "Mr. Eugene Wrayburn, ain't it?" said Miss Wren.

"So I am told," was the answer.

"You may come in, if you're good."

"I am not good," said Eugene, "but I'll come in."

He gave his hand to Jenny Wren, and he gave his hand to Lizzie, and he stood leaning by the door at Lizzie's side. He had been strolling with his cigar, he said (it was smoked out and gone by this time), and he had strolled round to return in that direction that he might look in as he passed. Had she not seen her brother to-night?

"Yes," said Lizzie, whose manner was a little troubled.

Gracious condescension on our brother's part! Mr. Eugene Wrayburn thought he had passed my young gentleman on the bridge yonder. Who was his friend with him?

"The schoolmaster."

"To be sure. Looked like it."

Lizzie sat so still, that one could not have said wherein the fact of her manner being troubled was expressed; and yet one could not have doubted it. Eugene was as easy as ever; but perhaps, as she sat with her eyes cast down, it might have been rather more perceptible that his attention was concentrated upon her for certain moments, than its concentration upon any subject for any short time ever was elsewhere.

"I have nothing to report, Lizzie," said Eugene. "But, having promised you that an eye should be always kept on Mr. Riderhood through my friend Lightwood, I like occasionally to renew my assurance that I keep my promise, and keep my friend up to the mark."

"I should not have doubted it, sir."

"Generally, I confess myself a man to be doubted," returned Eugene coolly, "for all that."

"Why are you?" asked the sharp Miss Wren.

"Because, my dear," said the airy Eugene, "I am a bad, idle dog."

"Then why don't you reform and be a good dog?" inquired Miss Wren.

"Because, my dear," returned Eugene, "there's nobody who makes it worth my while. Have you considered my suggestion, Lizzie?" This in a

lower voice, but only as if it were a graver matter; not at all to the exclusion of the person of the house.

"I have thought of it, Mr. Wrayburn, but I have not been able to make up my mind to accept it."

"False pride!" said Eugene.

"I think not, Mr. Wrayburn. I hope not."

"False pride!" repeated Eugene. "Why, what else is it? The thing is worth nothing in itself. The thing is worth nothing to me. What can it be worth to me? You know the most I make of it. I propose to be of some use to somebody — which I never was in this world, and never shall be on any other occasion — by paying some qualified person of your own sex and age, so many (or rather so few) contemptible shillings, to come here certain nights in the week, and give you certain instruction, which you wouldn't want if you hadn't been a self-denying daughter and sister. You know that it's good to have it, or you would never have so devoted yourself to your brother's having it. Then why not have it: especially when our friend Miss Jenny here would profit by it too? If I proposed to be the teacher, or to attend the lessons — obviously incongruous! — but as to that, I might as well be on the other side of the globe, or not on the globe at all. False pride, Lizzie. Because true pride wouldn't shame, or be shamed by, your thankless brother. True pride wouldn't have schoolmasters brought here, like doctors, to look at a bad case. True pride would go to work and do it. You know that well enough, for you know that your own true pride would do it to-morrow, if you had the ways and means which false pride wouldn't

let me supply. Very well. I add no more than this. Your false pride does wrong to yourself and does wrong to your dead father."

"How to my father, Mr. Wrayburn?" she asked with an anxious face.

"How to your father? Can you ask? By perpetuating the consequences of his ignorant and blind obstinacy. By resolving not to set right the wrong he did you. By determining that the deprivation to which he condemned you, and which he forced upon you, shall always rest upon his head."

It chanced to be a subtle string to sound, in her who had so spoken to her brother within the hour. It sounded far more forcibly, because of the change in the speaker for the moment; the passing appearance of earnestness, complete conviction, injured resentment of suspicion, generous and unselfish interest. All these qualities, in him usually so light and careless, she felt to be inseparable from some touch of their opposites in her own breast. She thought, had she, so far below him and so different, rejected this disinterestedness, because of some vain misgiving that he sought her out, or heeded any personal attractions that he might descry in her? The poor girl, pure of heart and purpose, could not bear to think it. Sinking before her own eyes, as she suspected herself of it, she drooped her head as though she had done him some wicked and grievous injury, and broke into silent tears.

"Don't be distressed," said Eugene very, very kindly. "I hope it is not I who have distressed you. I meant no more than to put the matter in

its true light before you; though I acknowledge I did it selfishly enough, for I am disappointed."

Disappointed of doing her a service. How else *could* he be disappointed?

"It won't break my heart," laughed Eugene; "it won't stay by me eight and forty hours; but I am genuinely disappointed. I had set my fancy on doing this little thing for you, and for our friend Miss Jenny. The novelty of my doing anything in the least useful had its charms. I see now that I might have managed it better. I might have affected to do it wholly for our friend Miss J. I might have got myself up, morally, as Sir Eugene Bountiful. But, upon my soul, I can't make flourishes, and I would rather be disappointed than try."

If he meant to follow home what was in Lizzie's thoughts, it was skilfully done. If he followed it by mere fortuitous coincidence, it was done by an evil chance.

"It opened out so naturally before me," said Eugene. "The ball seemed so thrown into my hands by accident! I happen to be originally brought into contact with you, Lizzie, on those two occasions that you know of. I happen to be able to promise you that a watch shall be kept upon that false accuser, Riderhood. I happen to be able to give you some little consolation in the darkest hour of your distress, by assuring you that I don't believe him. On the same occasion I tell you that I am the idlest and least of lawyers, but that I am better than none, in a case I have noted down with my own hand, and that you may be always sure of my best help, and incidentally of Lightwood's too, in

your efforts to clear your father. So, it gradually takes my fancy that I may help you—so easily!—to clear your father of that other blame which I mentioned a few minutes ago, and which is a just and real one. I hope I have explained myself, for I am heartily sorry to have distressed you. I hate to claim to mean well, but I really did mean honestly and simply well, and I want you to know it."

"I have never doubted that, Mr. Wrayburn," said Lizzie; the more repentant, the less he claimed.

"I am very glad to hear it. Though, if you had quite understood my whole meaning at first, I think you would not have refused. Do you think you would?"

"I—I don't know that I should, Mr. Wrayburn."

"Well! Then why refuse now that you do understand it?"

"It's not easy for me to talk to you," returned Lizzie in some confusion, "for you see all the consequences of what I say as soon as I say it."

"Take all the consequences," laughed Eugene, "and take away my disappointment. Lizzie Hexam, as I truly respect you, and as I am your friend and a poor devil of a gentleman, I protest I don't even now understand why you hesitate."

There was an appearance of openness, trustfulness, unsuspecting generosity, in his words and manner, that won the poor girl over; and not only won her over, but again caused her to feel as though she had been influenced by the opposite qualities, with vanity at their head.

"I will not hesitate any longer, Mr. Wrayburn. I hope you will not think the worse of me for hav-

ing hesitated at all. For myself and for Jenny — you let me answer for you, Jenny dear?"

The little creature had been leaning back, attentive, with her elbows resting on the elbows of her chair, and her chin upon her hands. Without changing her attitude, she answered, "Yes!" so suddenly, that it rather seemed as if she had chopped the monosyllable than spoken it.

"For myself and for Jenny, I thankfully accept your kind offer."

"Agreed! Dismissed!" said Eugene, giving Lizzie his hand before lightly waving it, as if he waved the whole subject away. "I hope it may not be often that so much is made of so little!"

Then he fell to talking playfully with Jenny Wren. "I think of setting up a doll, Miss Jenny," he said.

"You had better not," replied the dressmaker.

"Why not?"

"You are sure to break it. All you children do."

"But that makes good for trade, you know, Miss Wren," returned Eugene. "Much as people's breaking promises, and contracts, and bargains of all sorts, makes good for *my* trade."

"I don't know about that," Miss Wren retorted; "but you had better by half set up a pen-wiper, and turn industrious, and use it."

"Why, if we were all as industrious as you, little Busy-Body, we should begin to work as soon as we could crawl, and there would be a bad thing!"

"Do you mean," returned the little creature, with a flush suffusing her face, "bad for your backs and your legs?"

"No, no, no," said Eugene; shocked — to do him

justice — at the thought of trifling with her infirmity. "Bad for business, bad for business. If we all set to work as soon as we could use our hands, it would be all over with the dolls' dressmakers."

"There's something in that," replied Miss Wren; "you have a sort of an idea in your noddle sometimes." Then in a changed tone: "Talking of ideas, my Lizzie," — they were sitting side by side, as they had sat at first — "I wonder how it happens that when I am work, work, working here, all alone in the summer-time, I smell flowers."

"As a commonplace individual, I should say," Eugene suggested languidly — for he was growing weary of the person of the house — "that you smell flowers because you *do* smell flowers."

"No, I don't," said the little creature, resting one arm upon the elbow of her chair, resting her chin upon that hand, and looking vacantly before her; "this is not a flowery neighborhood. It's anything but that. And yet, as I sit at work, I smell miles of flowers. I smell roses, till I think I see the rose-leaves lying in heaps, bushels, on the floor. I smell fallen leaves, till I put down my hand — so — and expect to make them rustle. I smell the white and the pink May in the hedges, and all sorts of flowers that I never was among. For I have seen very few flowers indeed in my life."

"Pleasant fancies to have, Jenny dear!" said her friend: with a glance towards Eugene, as if she would have asked him whether they were given the child in compensation for her losses.

"So I think, Lizzie, when they come to me. And the birds I hear! Oh!" cried the little creature, holding out her hand and looking upward, "how they sing!"

There was something in the face and action, for the moment, quite inspired and beautiful. Then the chin dropped musingly upon the hand again.

"I dare say my birds sing better than other birds, and my flowers smell better than other flowers. For when I was a little child," in a tone as though it were ages ago, "the children that I used to see early in the morning were very different from any others that I ever saw. They were not like me; they were not chilled, anxious, ragged, or beaten; they were never in pain. They were not like the children of the neighbors; they never made me tremble all over, by setting up shrill noises, and they never mocked me. Such numbers of them, too! All in white dresses, and with something shining on the borders, and on their heads, that I have never been able to imitate with my work, though I know it so well. They used to come down in long bright slanting rows, and say all together, 'Who is this in pain? Who is this in pain?' When I told them who it was, they answered, 'Come and play with us!' When I said, 'I never play! I can't play!' they swept about me, and took me up, and made me light. Then it was all delicious ease and rest till they laid me down, and said, all together, 'Have patience, and we will come again.' Whenever they came back, I used to know they were coming, before I saw the long bright rows, by hearing them ask, all together a long way off, 'Who is this in pain? who is this in pain?' And I used to cry out, 'Oh, my blessed children, it's poor me! Have pity on me! Take me up, and make me light!'"

By degrees, as she progressed in this remem-

brance, the hand was raised, the last ecstatic look returned, and she became quite beautiful. Having so paused for a moment, silent, with a listening smile upon her face, she looked round and recalled herself.

"What poor fun you think me; don't you, Mr. Wrayburn? You may well look tired of me. But it's Saturday night, and I won't detain you."

"That is to say, Miss Wren," observed Eugene, quite ready to profit by the hint, "you wish me to go?"

"Well, it's Saturday night," she returned, "and my child's coming home. And my child is a troublesome, bad child, and costs me a world of scolding. I would rather you didn't see my child."

"A doll?" said Eugene, not understanding, and looking for an explanation.

But Lizzie, with her lips only, shaping the two words, "Her father," he delayed no longer. He took his leave immediately. At the corner of the street he stopped to light another cigar, and possibly to ask himself what he was doing otherwise. If so, the answer was indefinite and vague. Who knows what he is doing, who is careless what he does?

A man stumbled against him as he turned away, who mumbled some maudlin apology. Looking after this man, Eugene saw him go in at the door by which he himself had just come out.

On the man's stumbling into the room, Lizzie rose to leave it.

"Don't go away, Miss Hexam," he said in a submissive manner, speaking thickly and with difficulty. "Don't fly from unfortunate man in shattered state of health. Give poor invalid honor of your company. It ain't — ain't catching."

Lizzie murmured that she had something to do in her own room, and went away upstairs.

"How's my Jenny?" said the man timidly. "How's my Jenny Wren, best of children, object dearest affections broken-hearted invalid?"

To which the person of the house, stretching out her arm in an attitude of command, replied with irresponsive asperity, "Go along with you! Go along into your corner! Get into your corner directly!"

The wretched spectacle made as if he would have offered some remonstrance; but, not venturing to resist the person of the house, thought better of it, and went and sat down on a particular chair of disgrace.

"Oh-h-h!" cried the person of the house, pointing her little finger. "You bad old boy! Oh-h-h, you naughty, wicked creature! *What* do you mean by it?"

The shaking figure, unnerved and disjointed from head to foot, put out its two hands a little way, as making overtures of peace and reconciliation. Abject tears stood in its eyes, and stained the blotched red of its cheeks. The swollen, lead-colored under lip trembled with a shameful whine. The whole indecorous, threadbare ruin, from the broken shoes to the prematurely gray, scanty hair, grovelled. Not with any sense, worthy to be called a sense, of this dire reversal of the places of parent and child, but in a pitiful expostulation to be let off from a scolding.

"*I* know your tricks and your manners!" cried Miss Wren. "*I* know where you've been to!" (which, indeed, it did not require discernment to discover.) "Oh, you disgraceful old chap!"

The very breathing of the figure was contemptible, as it labored and rattled in that operation like a blundering clock.

"Slave, slave, slave, from morning to night," pursued the person of the house, "and all for this! *What* do you mean by it?"

There was something in that emphasised "What," which absurdly frightened the figure. As often as the person of the house worked her way round to it—even as soon as he saw that it was coming—he collapsed in an extra degree.

"I wish you had been taken up, and locked up," said the person of the house. "I wish you had been poked into cells and black holes, and run over by rats and spiders and beetles. *I* know their tricks and their manners, and they'd have tickled you nicely. Ain't you ashamed of yourself?"

"Yes, my dear," stammered the father.

"Then," said the person of the house, terrifying him by a grand muster of her spirits and forces before recurring to the emphatic word, "*What* do you mean by it?"

"Circumstances over which had no control," was the miserable creature's plea in extenuation.

"*I*'ll circumstance you and control you too," retorted the person of the house, speaking with vehement sharpness, "if you talk in that way. I'll give you in charge to the police, and have you fined five shillings when you can't pay, and then I won't pay the money for you, and you'll be transported for life. How should you like to be transported for life?"

"Shouldn't like it. Poor shattered invalid. Trouble nobody long," cried the wretched figure.

"Come, come!" said the person of the house, tapping the table near her in a business-like manner, and shaking her head and her chin; "you know what you've got to do. Put down your money this instant."

The obedient figure began to rummage in its pockets.

"Spent a fortune out of your wages, I'll be bound!" said the person of the house. "Put it here! All you've got left! Every farthing!"

Such a business as he made of collecting it from his dog's-eared pockets; of expecting it in this pocket, and not finding it; of not expecting it in that pocket, and passing it over; of finding no pocket where that other pocket ought to be!

"Is this all?" demanded the person of the house, when a confused heap of pence and shillings lay on the table.

"Got no more," was the rueful answer, with an accordant shake of the head.

"Let me make sure. You know what you've got to do. Turn all your pockets inside out, and leave 'em so!" cried the person of the house.

He obeyed. And, if anything could have made him look more abject or more dismally ridiculous than before, it would have been his so displaying himself.

"Here's but seven-and-eightpence-halfpenny!" exclaimed Miss Wren, after reducing the heap to order. "Oh, you prodigal old son! Now you shall be starved."

"No, don't starve me," he urged, whimpering.

"If you were treated as you ought to be," said Miss Wren, "you'd be fed upon the skewers of cats'-

meat; — only the skewers, after the cats had had the meat. As it is, go to bed."

When he stumbled out of the corner to comply, he again put out both his hands, and pleaded: "Circumstances over which no control" —

"Get along with you to bed!" cried Miss Wren, snapping him up. "Don't speak to me. I'm not going to forgive you. Go to bed this moment!"

Seeing another emphatic "What" upon its way, he evaded it by complying, and was heard to shuffle heavily upstairs, and shut his door, and throw himself on his bed. Within a little while afterwards, Lizzie came down.

"Shall we have our supper, Jenny dear?"

"Ah! bless and save us, we need have something to keep us going," returned Miss Jenny, shrugging her shoulders.

Lizzie laid a cloth upon the little bench (most handy for the person of the house than an ordinary table), and put upon it such plain fare as they were accustomed to have, and drew up a stool for herself.

"Now for supper! What are you thinking of, Jenny darling?"

"I was thinking," she returned, coming out of a deep study, "what I would do to Him, if he should turn out a drunkard."

"Oh, but he won't!" said Lizzie. "You'll take care of that beforehand."

"I shall try to take care of it beforehand, but he might deceive me. Oh, my dear, all those fellows with their tricks and their manners do deceive!" With the little fist in full action. "And if so, I tell you what I think I'd do. When he was asleep, I'd make a spoon red-hot, and I'd have some boiling

liquor bubbling in a saucepan, and I'd take it out hissing, and I'd open his mouth with the other hand — or perhaps he'd sleep with his mouth ready open — and I'd pour it down his throat, and blister it and choke him."

"I am sure you would do no such horrible thing," said Lizzie.

"Shouldn't I? Well; perhaps I shouldn't. But I should like to!"

"I am equally sure you would not."

"Not even like to? Well, you generally know best. Only you haven't always lived among it as I have lived — and your back isn't bad, and your legs are not queer."

As they went on with their supper, Lizzie tried to bring her round to that prettier and better state. But the charm was broken. The person of the house was the person of a house full of sordid shames and cares, with an upper room in which that abased figure was infecting even innocent sleep with sensual brutality and degradation. The doll's dressmaker had become a little quaint shrew; of the world, worldly; of the earth, earthy.

Poor doll's dressmaker! How often so dragged down by hands that should have raised her up; how often so misdirected when losing her way on the eternal road, and asking guidance! Poor, poor little doll's dressmaker!

CHAPTER III.

A PIECE OF WORK.

BRITANNIA, sitting meditating one fine day (perhaps in the attitude in which she is presented on the copper coinage), discovers all of a sudden that she wants Veneering in Parliament. It occurs to her that Veneering is "a representative man" — which cannot in these times be doubted — and that her Majesty's faithful Commons are incomplete without him. So Britannia mentions to a legal gentleman of her acquaintance that if Veneering will "put down" five thousand pounds, he may write a couple of initial letters after his name at the extremely cheap rate of two thousand five hundred per letter. It is clearly understood between Britannia and the legal gentleman that nobody is to take up the five thousand pounds, but that, being put down, they will disappear by magical conjuration and enchantment.

The legal gentleman in Britannia's confidence going straight from that lady to Veneering, thus commissioned, Veneering declares himself highly flattered, but requires breathing-time to ascertain "whether his friends will rally round him." Above all things, he says, it behooves him to be clear, at a crisis of this importance, "whether his friends

will rally round him." The legal gentleman, in the interests of his client, cannot allow much time for this purpose, as the lady rather thinks she knows somebody prepared to put down six thousand pounds; but he says he will give Veneering four hours.

Veneering then says to Mrs. Veneering, "We must work," and throws himself into a Hansom cab. Mrs. Veneering in the same moment relinquishes baby to Nurse; presses her aquiline hands upon her brow, to arrange the throbbing intellect within; orders out the carriage; and repeats in a distracted and devoted manner, compounded of Ophelia and any self-immolating female of antiquity you may prefer, "We must work."

Veneering, having instructed his driver to charge at the Public in the streets like the Life-Guards at Waterloo, is driven furiously to Duke Street, St. James's. There, he finds Twemlow in his lodgings, fresh from the hands of a secret artist who has been doing something to his hair with yolks of eggs. The process requiring that Twemlow shall, for two hours after the application, allow his hair to stick upright and dry gradually, he is in an appropriate state for the receipt of startling intelligence; looking equally like the monument on Fish Street Hill, and King Priam on a certain incendiary occasion not wholly unknown as a neat point from the classics.

"My dear Twemlow," says Veneering, grasping both his hands, "as the dearest and oldest of my friends" —

("Then there can be no more doubt about it in future," thinks Twemlow, "and I AM!")

"— Are you of opinion that your cousin, Lord Snigsworth, would give his name as a Member of my Committee? I don't go so far as to ask for his lordship; I only ask for his name. Do you think he would give me his name?"

In sudden low spirits, Twemlow replies, "I don't think he would."

"My political opinions," says Veneering, not previously aware of having any, "are identical with those of Lord Snigsworth, and perhaps, as a matter of public feeling and public principle, Lord Snigsworth would give me his name."

"It might be so," says Twemlow; "but"— And perplexedly scratching his head, forgetful of the yolks of eggs, is the more discomfited by being reminded how sticky he is.

"Between such old and intimate friends as ourselves," pursues Veneering, "there should in such a case be no reserve. Promise me that if I ask you to do anything for me which you don't like to do, or feel the slightest difficulty in doing, you will freely tell me so."

This Twemlow is so kind as to promise, with every appearance of most heartily intending to keep his word.

"Would you have any objection to write down to Snigsworthy Park, and ask this favor of Lord Snigsworth? Of course, if it were granted, I should know that I owed it solely to you; while at the same time you would put it to Lord Snigsworth entirely upon public grounds. Would you have any objection?"

Says Twemlow, with his hand to his forehead. "You have exacted a promise from me."

"I have, my dear Twemlow."

"And you expect me to keep it honorably?"

"I do, my dear Twemlow."

"*On* the whole, then; — observe me," urges Twemlow with great nicety, as if, in the case of its having been off the whole, he would have done it directly, — "*on* the whole, I must beg you to excuse me from addressing any communication to Lord Snigsworth."

"Bless you, bless you!" says Veneering; horribly disappointed, but grasping him by both hands again in a particularly fervent manner.

It is not to be wondered at that poor Twemlow should decline to inflict a letter on his noble cousin (who has gout in the temper), inasmuch as his noble cousin, who allows him a small annuity on which he lives, takes it out of him, as the phrase goes, in extreme severity; putting him, when he visits at Snigsworthy Park, under a kind of martial law; ordaining that he shall hang his hat on a particular peg, sit on a particular chair, talk on particular subjects to particular people, and perform particular exercises; such as sounding the praises of the Family Varnish (not to say Pictures), and abstaining from the choicest of the Family Wines, unless expressly invited to partake.

"One thing, however, I *can* do for you," says Twemlow; "and that is, work for you."

Veneering blesses him again.

"I'll go," says Twemlow in a rising hurry of spirits, "to the club; — let us see now; what o'clock is it?"

"Twenty minutes to eleven."

"I'll be," says Twemlow, "at the club by ten

minutes to twelve, and I'll never leave it all day."

Veneering feels that his friends are rallying round him, and says, "Thank you, thank you. I knew I could rely upon you. I said to Anastatia before leaving home just now to come to you — of course the first friend I have seen on a subject so momentous to me, my dear Twemlow — I said to Anastatia, 'We must work.'"

"You were right, you were right," replies Twemlow. "Tell me. Is she working?"

"She is," says Veneering.

"Good!" cries Twemlow, polite little gentleman that he is. "A woman's tact is invaluable. To have the dear sex with us is to have everything with us."

"But you have not imparted to me," remarks Veneering, "what you think of my entering the House of Commons?"

"I think," rejoins Twemlow feelingly, "that it is the best club in London."

Veneering again blesses him, plunges downstairs, rushes into his Hansom, and directs the driver to be up and at the British public, and to charge into the City.

Meanwhile, Twemlow, in an increasing hurry of spirits, gets his hair down as well as he can — which is not very well; for, after these glutinous applications, it is restive, and has a surface on it somewhat in the nature of pastry — and gets to the club by the appointed time. At the club he promptly secures a large window, writing materials, and all the newspapers, and establishes himself, immovable, to be respectfully contemplated by Pall Mall. Sometimes,

when a man enters who nods to him, Twemlow says, "Do you know Veneering?" Man says, "No; member of the club?" Twemlow says, "Yes. Coming in for Pocket-Breaches." Man says, "Ah! Hope he may find it worth the money!" yawns, and saunters out. Towards six o'clock of the afternoon, Twemlow begins to persuade himself that he is positively jaded with work, and thinks it much to be regretted that he was not brought up as a Parliamentary agent.

From Twemlow's Veneering dashes at Podsnap's place of business. Finds Podsnap reading the paper, standing, and inclined to be oratorical over the astonishing discovery he has made, that Italy is not England. Respectfully entreats Podsnap's pardon for stopping the flow of his words of wisdom, and informs him what is in the wind. Tells Podsnap that their political opinions are identical. Gives Podsnap to understand that he, Veneering, formed his political opinions while sitting at the feet of him, Podsnap. Seeks earnestly to know whether Podsnap "will rally round him?"

Says Podsnap, something sternly: "Now, first of all, Veneering, do you ask my advice?"

Veneering falters that, as so old and so dear a friend—

"Yes, yes, that's all very well," says Podsnap; "but have you made up your mind to take this borough of Pocket-Breaches on its own terms, or do you ask my opinion whether you shall take it or leave it alone?"

Veneering repeats that his heart's desire and his soul's thirst are, that Podsnap shall rally round him.

"Now, I'll be plain with you, Veneering," says

Podsnap, knitting his brows. "You will infer that *I* don't care about Parliament, from the fact of my not being there?"

Why, of course Veneering knows that! Of course Veneering knows that, if Podsnap chose to go there, he would be there, in a space of time that might be stated by the light and thoughtless as a jiffy.

"It is not worth my while," pursues Podsnap, becoming handsomely mollified, "and it is the reverse of important to my position. But it is not my wish to set myself up as law for another man, differently situated. You think it is worth your while, and is important to your position. Is that so?"

Always with the proviso that Podsnap will rally round him, Veneering thinks it is so.

"Then you don't ask my advice," says Podsnap. "Good. Then I won't give it you. But you do ask my help. Good. Then I'll work for you."

Veneering instantly blesses him, and apprises him that Twemlow is already working. Podsnap does not quite approve that anybody should be already working — regarding it rather in the light of a liberty — but tolerates Twemlow, and says he is a well-connected old female who will do no harm.

"I have nothing very particular to do to-day," adds Podsnap, "and I'll mix with some influential people. I had engaged myself to dinner, but I'll send Mrs. Podsnap, and get off going myself, and I'll dine with you at eight. It's important we should report progress and compare notes. Now, let me see. You ought to have a couple of active, energetic fellows, of gentlemanly manners, to go about."

Veneering, after cogitation, thinks of Boots and Brewer.

"Whom I have met at your house," says Podsnap. "Yes. They'll do very well. Let them each have a cab, and go about."

Veneering immediately mentions what a blessing he feels it to possess a friend capable of such grand administrative suggestions, and really is elated at this going about of Boots and Brewer, as an idea wearing an electioneering aspect, and looking desperately like business. Leaving Podsnap, at a hand-gallop, he descends upon Boots and Brewer, who enthusiastically rally round him by at once bolting off in cabs, taking opposite directions. Then Veneering repairs to the legal gentleman in Britannia's confidence, and with him transacts some delicate affairs of business, and issues an address to the independent electors of Pocket-Breaches, announcing that he is coming among them for their suffrages, as the mariner returns to the home of his early childhood: a phrase which is none the worse for his never having been near the place in his life, and not even now distinctly knowing where it is.

Mrs. Veneering, during the same eventful hours, is not idle. No sooner does the carriage turn out, all complete, than she turns into it, all complete, and gives the word "To Lady Tippins's." That charmer dwells over a stay-maker's in the Belgravian Borders, with a life-size model in the window on the ground floor, of a distinguished beauty in a blue petticoat, stay-lace in hand, looking over her shoulder at the town in innocent surprise. As well she may, to find herself dressing under the circumstances.

Lady Tippins at home? Lady Tippins at home, with the room darkened, and her back (like the

lady's at the ground-floor window, though for a different reason) cunningly turned towards the light. Lady Tippins is so surprised by seeing her dear Mrs. Veneering so early — in the middle of the night, the pretty creature calls it — that her eyelids almost go up under the influence of that emotion.

To whom Mrs. Veneering incoherently communicates how that Veneering has been offered Pocket-Breaches; how that it is the time for rallying round; how that Veneering has said, "We must work;" how that she is here, as a wife and mother to entreat Lady Tippins to work; how that the carriage is at Lady Tippins's disposal for purposes of work; how that she, proprietress of said brand-new elegant equipage, will return home on foot — on bleeding feet if need be — to work (not specifying how) until she drops by the side of baby's crib.

"My love," says Lady Tippins, "compose yourself; we'll bring him in." And Lady Tippins really does work, and work the Veneering horses too; for she clatters about town all day, calling upon everybody she knows, and showing her entertaining powers and green fan to immense advantage, by rattling on with, My dear soul, what do you think? What do you suppose me to be? You'll never guess. I'm pretending to be an electioneering agent. And for what place, of all places? Pocket-Breaches. And why? Because the dearest friend I have in the world has bought it. And who is the dearest friend I have in the world? A man of the name of Veneering. Not omitting his wife, who is the other dearest friend I have in the world; and I positively declare I forgot their baby who is the other. And we are carrying on this little farce to keep up appearances,

and isn't it refreshing? Then, my precious child, the fun of it is that nobody knows who these Veneerings are, and that they know nobody, and that they have a house out of the Tales of the Genii, and give dinners out of the Arabian Nights. Curious to see 'em, my dear? Say you'll know 'em. Come and dine with 'em. They sha'n't bore you. Say who shall meet you. We'll make up a party of our own, and I'll engage that they shall not interfere with you for one single moment. You really ought to see their gold and silver camels. I call their dinner-table the Caravan. Do come and dine with my Veneerings, my own Veneerings, my exclusive property, the dearest friends I have in the world! And above all, my dear, be sure you promise me your vote and interest and all sorts of plumpers for Pocket-Breaches; for we couldn't think of spending sixpence on it, my love, and can only consent to be brought in by the spontaneous thingummies of the incorruptible whatdoyoucallums.

Now, the point of view seized by the bewitching Tippins, that this same working and rallying round is to keep up appearances, may have something in it, but not all the truth. More is done, or considered to be done — which does as well — by taking cabs, and "going about," than the fair Tippins knew of. Many vast vague reputations have been made solely by taking cabs and going about. This particularly obtains in all Parliamentary affairs. Whether the business in hand be to get a man in, or get a man out, or get a man over, or promote a railway, or jockey a railway, or what else, nothing is understood to be so effectual as scouring nowhere in a violent hurry — in short, as taking cabs about.

Probably because this reason is in the air, Twemlow, far from being singular in his persuasion that he works like a Trojan, is capped by Podsnap, who in his turn is capped by Boots and Brewer. At eight o'clock, when all these hard workers assemble to dine at Veneering's, it is understood that the cabs of Boots and Brewer mustn't leave the door, but that pails of water must be brought from the nearest baiting-place and cast over the horses' legs on the very spot, lest Boots and Brewer should have instant occasion to mount and away. These fleet messengers require the Analytical to see that their hats are deposited where they can be laid hold of at an instant's notice; and they dine (remarkably well, though) with the air of firemen in charge of an engine, expecting intelligence of some tremendous conflagration.

Mrs. Veneering faintly remarks, as dinner opens, that many such days would be too much for her.

"Many such days would be too much for all of us," says Podsnap; "but we'll bring him in!"

"We'll bring him in," says Lady Tippins, sportively waving her green fan. "Veneering forever!"

"We'll bring him in!" says Twemlow.

"We'll bring him in!" say Boots and Brewer.

Strictly speaking, it would be hard to show cause why they should not bring him in, Pocket-Breaches having closed its little bargain, and there being no opposition. However, it is agreed that they must "work" to the last, and that, if they did not work, something indefinite would happen. It is likewise agreed that they are all so exhausted with the work behind them, and need to be so fortified for the work before them, as to require peculiar strength-

ening from Veneering's cellar. Therefore the Analytical has orders to produce the cream of the cream of his bins, and therefore it falls out that rallying becomes rather a trying word for the occasion; Lady Tippins being observed gamely to inculcate the necessity of rearing round their dear Veneering; Podsnap advocating roaring round him; Boots and Brewer declaring their intention of reeling round him; and Veneering thanking his devoted friends one and all, with great emotion, for rarullarulling round him.

In these inspiring moments Brewer strikes out an idea which is the great hit of the day. He consults his watch, and says (like Guy Fawkes) he'll now go down to the House of Commons and see how things look.

"I'll keep about the lobby for an hour or so," says Brewer with a deeply mysterious countenance, "and, if things look well, I won't come back, but will order my cab for nine in the morning."

"You couldn't do better," says Podsnap.

Veneering expresses his inability ever to acknowledge this last service. Tears stand in Mrs. Veneering's affectionate eyes. Boots shows envy, loses ground, and is regarded as possessing a second-rate mind. They all crowd to the door to see Brewer off. Brewer says to his driver, "Now, is your horse pretty fresh?" eying the animal with critical scrutiny. Driver says he's as fresh as butter. "Put him along, then," says Brewer; "House of Commons." Driver darts up, Brewer leaps in, they cheer him as he departs, and Mr. Podsnap says, "Mark my words, sir. That's a man of resource; that's a man to make his way in life."

When the time comes for Veneering to deliver a neat and appropriate stammer to the men of Pocket-Breaches, only Podsnap and Twemlow accompany him by railway to that sequestered spot. The legal gentleman is at the Pocket-Breaches Branch Station, with an open carriage with a printed bill, "Veneering forever," stuck upon it, as if it were a wall; and they gloriously proceed, amidst the grins of the populace, to a feeble little Town-hall on crutches, with some onions and bootlaces under it, which the legal gentleman says are a Market; and from the front window of that edifice Veneering speaks to the listening earth. In the moment of his taking his hat off, Podsnap, as per agreement made with Mrs. Veneering, telegraphs to that wife and mother, "He's up."

Veneering loses his way in the usual No Thoroughfares of speech, and Podsnap and Twemlow say, Hear, hear! and sometimes, when he can't by any means back himself out of some very unlucky No Thoroughfare, "He-a-a-r, He-a-a-r!" with an air of facetious conviction, as if the ingenuity of the thing gave them a sensation of exquisite pleasure. But Veneering makes two remarkably good points; so good, that they are supposed to have been suggested to him by the legal gentleman in Britannia's confidence, while briefly conferring on the stairs.

Point the first is this. Veneering institutes an original comparison between the country and a ship; pointedly calling the ship the Vessel of the State, and the Minister the Man at the Helm. Veneering's object is to let Pocket-Breaches know that his friend on his right (Podsnap) is a man of wealth. Consequently says he, "And, gentlemen, when the

timbers of the Vessel of the State are unsound, and the Man at the Helm is unskilful, would those great Marine Insurers, who rank among our world-famed merchant-princes — would they insure her, gentlemen? Would they underwrite her? Would they incur a risk in her? Would they have confidence in her? Why, gentlemen, if I appealed to my honorable friend upon my right, himself among the greatest and most respected of that great and much-respected class, he would answer, No!"

Point the second is this. The telling fact that Twemlow is related to Lord Snigsworth must be let off. Veneering supposes a state of public affairs that probably never could by any possibility exist (though this is not quite certain, in consequence of his picture being unintelligible to himself and everybody else), and thus proceeds: "Why, gentlemen, if I were to indicate such a programme to any class of society, I say it would be received with derision, would be pointed at by the finger of scorn. If I indicated such a programme to any worthy and intelligent tradesman of your town — nay, I will here be personal, and say Our town — what would he reply? He would reply, 'Away with it!' That's what *he* would reply, gentlemen. In his honest indignation he would reply, 'Away with it!' But suppose I mounted higher in the social scale. Suppose I drew my arm through the arm of my respected friend upon my left, and, walking with him through the ancestral woods of his family, and under the spreading beeches of Snigsworthy Park, approached the noble hall, crossed the courtyard, entered by the door, went up the staircase, and, passing from room to room, found myself at last in

the august presence of my friend's near kinsman, Lord Snigsworth. And suppose I said to that venerable earl, 'My lord, I am here before your lordship, presented by your lordship's near kinsman, my friend upon my left, to indicate that programme;' what would his lordship answer? Why, he would answer, 'Away with it!' That's what he would answer, gentlemen. 'Away with it!' Unconsciously using, in his exalted sphere, the exact language of the worthy and intelligent tradesman of our town, the near and dear kinsman of my friend upon my left would answer in his wrath, 'Away with it!'"

Veneering finishes with this last success, and Mr. Podsnap telegraphs to Mrs. Veneering, "He's down."

Then, dinner is had at the hotel with the legal gentleman, and then there are, in due succession, nomination and declaration. Finally, Mr. Podsnap telegraphs to Mrs. Veneering, "We have brought him in."

Another gorgeous dinner awaits them on their return to the Veneering halls, and Lady Tippins awaits them, and Boots and Brewer await them. There is a modest assertion on everybody's part that everybody single-handed "brought him in;" but in the main it is conceded by all, that that stroke of business on Brewer's part, in going down to the House that night to see how things looked, was the master-stroke.

A touching little incident is related by Mrs. Veneering in the course of the evening. Mrs. Veneering is habitually disposed to be tearful, and has an extra disposition that way after her late

excitement. Previous to withdrawing from the dinner-table with Lady Tippins, she says, in a pathetic and physically weak manner, —

"You will all think it foolish of me, I know, but I must mention it. As I sat by Baby's crib, on the night before the election, Baby was very uneasy in her sleep."

The Analytical Chemist, who is gloomily looking on, has diabolical impulses to suggest "Wind," and throw up his situation; but represses them.

"After an interval almost convulsive, Baby curled her little hands in one another, and smiled."

Mrs. Veneering stopping here, Mr. Podsnap deems it incumbent on him to say: "I wonder why!"

"Could it be, I asked myself," says Mrs. Veneering, looking about her for her pocket-handkerchief, "that the Fairies were telling Baby that her papa would shortly be an M. P.?"

So overcome by the sentiment is Mrs. Veneering, that they all get up to make a clear stage for Veneering, who goes round the table to the rescue, and bears her out backward, with her feet impressively scraping the carpet: after remarking that her work has been too much for her strength. Whether the fairies made any mention of the five thousand pounds, and it disagreed with Baby, is not speculated upon.

Poor little Twemlow, quite done up, is touched, and still continues touched after he is safely housed over the livery-stable yard in Duke Street, St. James's. But there, upon his sofa, a tremendous consideration breaks in upon the mild gentleman, putting all softer considerations to the rout.

"Gracious heavens! Now I have time to think of it, he never saw one of his constituents in all his days, until we saw them together!"

After having paced the room in distress of mind, with his hand to his forehead, the innocent Twemlow returns to his sofa and moans, —

"I shall either go distracted, or die, of this man. He comes upon me too late in life. I am not strong enough to bear him!"

CHAPTER IV.

CUPID PROMPTED.

To use the cold language of the world, Mrs. Alfred Lammle rapidly improved the acquaintance of Miss Podsnap. To use the warm language of Mrs. Lammle, she and her sweet Georgiana soon became one: in heart, in mind, in sentiment, in soul.

Whenever Georgiana could escape from the thraldom of Podsnappery; could throw off the bedclothes of the custard-colored phaeton, and get up; could shrink out of the range of her mother's rocking, and (so to speak) rescue her poor little frosty toes from being rocked over; she repaired to her friend, Mrs. Alfred Lammle. Mrs. Podsnap by no means objected. As a conscientiously "splendid woman," accustomed to overhear herself so denominated by elderly osteologists pursuing their studies in dinner society, Mrs. Podsnap could dispense with her daughter. Mr. Podsnap, for his part, on being informed where Georgiana was, swelled with patronage of the Lammles. That they, when unable to lay hold of him, should respectfully grasp at the hem of his mantle; that they, when they could not bask in the glory of him the sun, should

take up with the pale reflected light of the watery young moon his daughter; appeared quite natural, becoming, and proper. It gave him a better opinion of the discretion of the Lammles than he had heretofore held, as showing that they appreciated the value of the connection. So, Georgiana repairing to her friend, Mr. Podsnap went out to dinner, and to dinner, and yet to dinner, arm in arm with Mrs. Podsnap: settling his obstinate head in his cravat and shirt collar, much as if he were performing on the Pandean pipes, in his own honor, the triumphal march, See the conquering Podsnap comes, Sound the trumpets, beat the drums!

It was a trait in Mr. Podsnap's character (and, in one form or other, it will be generally seen to pervade the depths and shallows of Podsnappery), that he could not endure a hint of disparagement of any friend or acquaintance of his. "How dare you?" he would seem to say in such a case. "What do you mean? I have licensed this person. This person has taken out *my* certificate. Through this person you strike at me, Podsnap the Great. And it is not that I particularly care for the person's dignity, but that I do most particularly care for Podsnap's." Hence, if any one in his presence had presumed to doubt the responsibility of the Lammles, he would have been mightily huffed. Not that any one did, for Veneering, M. P., was always the authority for their being very rich, and perhaps believed it. As indeed he might, if he chose, for anything he knew of the matter.

Mr. and Mrs. Lammle's house in Sackville Street, Piccadilly, was but a temporary residence. It had done well enough, they informed their friends, for

Mr. Lammle when a bachelor, but it would not do now. So, they were always looking at palatial residences in the best situations, and always very nearly taking or buying one, but never quite concluding the bargain. Hereby they made for themselves a shining little reputation apart. People said, on seeing a vacant palatial residence, "The very thing for the Lammles!" and wrote to the Lammles about it, and the Lammles always went to look at it, but unfortunately it never exactly answered. In short, they suffered so many disappointments, that they began to think it would be necessary to build a palatial residence. And hereby they made another shining reputation; many persons of their acquaintance becoming by anticipation dissatisfied with their own houses, and envious of the non-existent Lammle structure.

The handsome fittings and furnishings of the house in Sackville Street were piled thick and high over the skeleton upstairs, and if it ever whispered from under its load of upholstery, "Here I am in the closet!" it was to very few ears, and certainly never to Miss Podsnap's. What Miss Podsnap was particularly charmed with, next to the graces of her friend, was the happiness of her friend's married life. This was frequently their theme of conversation.

"I am sure," said Miss Podsnap, "Mr. Lammle is like a lover. At least, I — I should think he was."

"Georgiana darling!" said Mrs. Lammle, holding up a forefinger, "take care."

"Oh, my goodness me!" exclaimed Miss Podsnap, reddening. "What have I said now?"

"Alfred, you know," hinted Mrs. Lammle, play-

fully shaking her head. "You were never to say Mr. Lammle any more, Georgiana."

"Oh! Alfred then. I am glad it's no worse. I was afraid I had said something shocking. I am always saying something wrong to ma."

"To me, Georgiana dearest?"

"No, not to you; you are not ma. I wish you were."

Mrs. Lammle bestowed a sweet and loving smile upon her friend, which Miss Podsnap returned as she best could. They sat at lunch in Mrs. Lammle's own boudoir.

"And so, dearest Georgiana, Alfred is like your notion of a lover?"

"I don't say that, Sophronia," Georgiana replied, beginning to conceal her elbows. "I haven't any notion of a lover. The dreadful wretches that ma brings up at places to torment me are not lovers. I only mean that Mr."—

"Again, dearest Georgiana?"

"That Alfred"—

"Sounds much better, darling."

"—Loves you so. He always treats you with such delicate gallantry and attention. Now, don't he?"

"Truly, my dear," said Mrs. Lammle, with a rather singular expression crossing her face, "I believe that he loves me fully as much as I love him."

"Oh, what happiness!" exclaimed Miss Podsnap.

"But do you know, my Georgiana," Mrs. Lammle resumed presently, "that there is something suspicious in your enthusiastic sympathy with Alfred's tenderness?"

"Good gracious no, I hope not!"

"Doesn't it rather suggest," said Mrs. Lammle archly, "that my Georgiana's little heart is" —

"Oh, don't!" Miss Podsnap blushingly besought her. "Please don't! I assure you, Sophronia, that I only praise Alfred because he is your husband and so fond of you."

Sophronia's glance was as if a rather new light broke in upon her. It shaded off into a cool smile as she said, with her eyes upon her lunch, and her eyebrows raised: —

"You are quite wrong, my love, in your guess at my meaning. What I insinuated was, that my Georgiana's little heart was growing conscious of a vacancy."

"No, no, no," said Georgiana. "I wouldn't have anybody say anything to me in that way for I don't know how many thousand pounds."

"In what way, my Georgiana?" inquired Mrs. Lammle, still smiling coolly, with her eyes upon her lunch, and her eyebrows raised.

"*You* know," returned poor little Miss Podsnap. "I think I should go out of my mind, Sophronia, with vexation and shyness and detestation, if anybody did. It's enough for me to see how loving you and your husband are. That's a different thing. I couldn't bear to have anything of that sort going on with myself. I should beg and pray to — to have the person taken away and trampled upon."

Ah! here was Alfred. Having stolen in unobserved, he playfully leaned on the back of Sophronia's chair, and, as Miss Podsnap saw him, put one of Sophronia's wandering locks to his lips, and waved a kiss from it towards Miss Podsnap.

"What is this about husbands and detestations?" inquired the captivating Alfred.

"Why, they say," returned his wife, "that listeners never hear any good of themselves; though you — But pray how long have you been here, sir?"

"This instant arrived, my own."

"Then I may go on — though, if you had been here but a moment or two sooner, you would have heard your praises sounded by Georgiana."

"Only, if they were to be called praises at all, which I really don't think they were," explained Miss Podsnap in a flutter, "for being so devoted to Sophronia."

"Sophronia!" murmured Alfred. "My life!" and kissed her hand. In return for which she kissed his watch-chain.

"But it was not I who was to be taken away and trampled upon, I hope?" said Alfred, drawing a seat between them.

"Ask Georgiana, my soul," replied his wife.

Alfred touchingly appealed to Georgiana.

"Oh, it was nobody!" replied Miss Podsnap. "It was nonsense."

"But if you are determined to know, Mr. Inquisitive Pet, as I suppose you are," said the happy and fond Sophronia, smiling, "it was any one who should venture to aspire to Georgiana."

"Sophronia, my love," remonstrated Mr. Lammle, becoming graver, "you are not serious?"

"Alfred, my love," returned his wife, "I dare say Georgiana was not, but I am."

"Now this," said Mr. Lammle, "shows the accidental combinations that there are in things! Could

you believe, my Ownest, that I came in here with the name of an aspirant to our Georgiana on my lips?"

"Of course I could believe, Alfred," said Mrs. Lammle, "anything that *you* told me."

"You dear one! And I anything that *you* told me."

How delightful those interchanges, and the looks accompanying them! Now, if the skeleton upstairs had taken that opportunity, for instance, of calling out, "Here I am, suffocating in the closet!"

"I give you my honor, my dear Sophronia" —

"And I know what that is, love," said she.

"You do, my darling. — That I came into the room all but uttering young Fledgeby's name. Tell Georgiana, dearest, about young Fledgeby."

"Oh, no, don't! Please don't!" cried Miss Podsnap, putting her fingers in her ears. "I'd rather not."

Mrs. Lammle laughed in her gayest manner, and, removing her Georgiana's unresisting hands, and playfully holding them in her own at arms' length, sometimes near together and sometimes wide apart, went on: —

"You must know, you dearly-beloved little goose, that once upon a time there was a certain person called young Fledgeby. And this young Fledgeby, who was of an excellent family and rich, was known to two other certain persons, dearly attached to one another, and called Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Lammle. So this young Fledgeby, being one night at the play, there sees with Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Lammle a certain heroine called" —

"No, don't say Georgiana Podsnap!" pleaded

that young lady, almost in tears. "Please don't! Oh, do do do say somebody else! Not Georgiana Podsnap. Oh, don't, don't, don't!"

"No other," said Mrs. Lammle, laughing airily, and, full of affectionate blandishments, opening and closing Georgiana's arms like a pair of compasses, "than my little Georgiana Podsnap. So this young Fledgeby goes to that Alfred Lammle, and says"—

"Oh, ple-e-e-ease don't!" cried Georgiana, as if the supplication were being squeezed out of her by powerful compression. "I so hate him for saying it!"

"For saying what, my dear?" laughed Mrs. Lammle.

"Oh, I don't know what he said!" cried Georgiana wildly, "but I hate him all the same for saying it!"

"My dear," said Mrs. Lammle, always laughing in her most captivating way, "the poor young fellow only says that he is stricken all of a heap."

"Oh, what shall I ever do?" interposed Georgiana. "Oh my goodness, what a Fool he must be!"

"—And implores to be asked to dinner, and to make a fourth at the play another time. And so he dines to-morrow and goes to the Opera with us. That's all. Except, my dear Georgiana—and what will you think of this?—that he is infinitely shyer than you, and far more afraid of you than you ever were of any one in all your days!"

In perturbation of mind, Miss Podsnap still fumed and plucked at her hands a little, but could not help laughing at the notion of anybody's being afraid of her. With that advantage, Sophronia flattered her and rallied her more successfully, and then the in-

sinuating Alfred flattered her and rallied her, and promised that at any moment when she might require that service at his hands he would take young Fledgeby out and trample on him. Thus it remained amicably understood that young Fledgeby was to come to admire, and that Georgiana was to come to be admired; and Georgiana, with the entirely new sensation in her breast of having that prospect before her, and with many kisses from her dear Sophronia in present possession, preceded six feet one of discontented footman (an amount of the article that always came for her when she walked home) to her father's dwelling.

The happy pair being left together, Mrs. Lammle said to her husband: —

"If I understand this girl, sir, your dangerous fascinations have produced some effect upon her. I mention the conquest in good time, because I apprehend your scheme to be more important to you than your vanity."

There was a mirror on the wall before them, and her eyes just caught him smirking in it. She gave the reflected image a look of the deepest disdain, and the image received it in the glass. Next moment they quietly eyed each other, as if they, the principals, had had no part in that expressive transaction.

It may have been that Mrs. Lammle tried in some manner to excuse her conduct to herself by depreciating the poor little victim of whom she spoke with acrimonious contempt. It may have been, too, that in this she did not quite succeed, for it is very difficult to resist confidence, and she knew she had Georgiana's.

Nothing more was said between the happy pair. Perhaps conspirators who have once established an understanding may not be over-fond of repeating the terms and objects of their conspiracy. Next day came; came Georgiana; and came Fledgeby.

Georgiana had by this time seen a good deal of the house and its frequenters. As there was a certain handsome room with a billiard-table in it — on the ground-floor, eating out a back-yard — which might have been Mr. Lammle's office, or library, but was called by neither name, but simply Mr. Lammle's room, so it would have been hard for stronger female heads than Georgiana's to determine whether its frequenters were men of pleasure or men of business. Between the room and the men there were strong points of general resemblance. Both were too gaudy, too slangy, too odorous of cigars, and too much given to horse-flesh; the latter characteristic being exemplified in the room by its decorations, and in the men by their conversation. High-stepping horses seemed necessary to all Mr. Lammle's friends — as necessary as their transaction of business together in a gypsy way at untimely hours of the morning and evening, and in rushes and snatches. There were friends who seemed to be always coming and going across the Channel, on errands about the Bourse, and Greek and Spanish and India and Mexican and par and premium and discount and three-quarters and seven-eighths. There were other friends who seemed to be always lolling and lounging in and out of the City, on questions of the Bourse, and Greek and Spanish and India and Mexican and par and premium and discount and three-quarters and seven-eighths. They

were all feverish, boastful, and inordinately loose, and they all ate and drank a great deal, and made bets in eating and drinking. They all spoke of sums of money, and only mentioned the sums and left the money to be understood: as "five and forty thousand Tom," or "two hundred and twenty-two on every individual share in the lot of 'em." They seemed to divide the world into two classes of people: people who were making enormous fortunes, and people who were being enormously ruined. They were always in a hurry, and yet seemed to have nothing tangible to do: except a few of them (these, mostly asthmatic and thick-lipped, who were forever demonstrating to the rest with gold pencil-cases which they could hardly hold because of the big rings on their forefingers how money was to be made. Lastly, they all swore at their grooms, and the grooms were not quite as respectful or complete as other men's grooms: seeming somehow to fall short of the groom point as their masters fell short of the gentleman point.

Young Fledgeby was none of these. Young Fledgeby had a peachy cheek, or a cheek compounded of the peach and the red red red wall on which it grows, and was an awkward, sandy-haired, small-eyed youth, exceeding slim (his enemies would have said lanky), and prone to self-examination in the articles of whisker and mustache. While feeling for the whisker that he anxiously expected, Fledgeby underwent remarkable fluctuations of spirits, ranging along the whole scale from confidence to despair. There were times when he started, as exclaiming, "By Jupiter, here it is at last!" There were other times when, being equally

depressed, he would be seen to shake his head, and give up hope. To see him at those periods leaning on a chimney-piece, like as on an urn containing the ashes of his ambition, with the cheek that would not sprout, upon the hand on which that cheek had forced conviction, was a distressing sight.

Not so was Fledgeby seen on this occasion. Arrayed in superb raiment, with his opera hat under his arm, he concluded his self-examination hopefully, awaited the arrival of Miss Podsnap, and talked small-talk with Mrs. Lammle. In facetious homage to the smallness of his talk, and the jerky nature of his manners, Fledgeby's familiars had agreed to confer upon him (behind his back) the honorary title of Fascination Fledgeby.

"Warm weather, Mrs. Lammle," said Fascination Fledgeby. Mrs. Lammle thought it scarcely as warm as it had been yesterday. "Perhaps not," said Fascination Fledgeby with great quickness of repartee; "but I expect it will be devilish warm to-morrow."

He threw off another little scintillation. "Been out to-day, Mrs. Lammle?"

Mrs. Lammle answered, For a short drive.

"Some people," said Fascination Fledgeby, "are accustomed to take long drives; but it generally appears to me that, if they make 'em too long, they overdo it."

Being in such feather, he might have surpassed himself in his next sally, had not Miss Podsnap been announced. Mrs. Lammle flew to embrace her darling little Georgy, and, when the first transports were over, presented Mr. Fledgeby. Mr. Lammle came on the scene last, for he was always late, and

so were the frequenters always late; all hands being bound to be made late, by private information about the Bourse, and Greek and Spanish and India and Mexican and par and premium and discount and three-quarters and seven-eighths.

A handsome little dinner was served immediately, and Mr. Lammle sat sparkling at his end of the table, with his servant behind his chair, and *his* ever-lingering doubts upon the subject of his wages behind himself. Mr. Lammle's utmost powers of sparkling were in requisition to-day, for Fascination Fledgeby and Georgiana not only struck each other speechless, but struck each other into astonishing attitudes: Georgiana, as she sat facing Fledgeby, making such efforts to conceal her elbows as were totally incompatible with the use of a knife and fork; and Fledgeby, as he sat facing Georgiana, avoiding her countenance by every possible device, and betraying the discomposure of his mind in feeling for his whiskers with his spoon, his wineglass, and his bread.

So, Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Lammle had to prompt, and this is how they prompted.

"Georgiana," said Mr. Lammle, low and smiling, and sparkling all over like a harlequin; "you are not in your usual spirits. Why are you not in your usual spirits, Georgiana?"

Georgiana faltered that she was much the same as she was in general; she was not aware of being different.

"Not aware of being different!" retorted Mr. Alfred Lammle. "You, my dear Georgiana! who are always so natural and unconstrained with us! who are such a relief from the crowd that are all

alike! who are the embodiment of gentleness, simplicity, and reality!"

Miss Podsnap looked at the door, as if she entertained confused thoughts of taking refuge from these compliments in flight.

"Now, I will be judged," said Mr. Lammle, raising his voice a little, "by my friend Fledgeby."

"Oh, DON'T!" Miss Podsnap faintly ejaculated: when Mrs. Lammle took the prompt-book.

"I beg your pardon, Alfred, my dear, but I cannot part with Mr. Fledgeby quite yet; you must wait for him a moment. Mr. Fledgeby and I are engaged in a personal discussion."

Fledgeby must have conducted it on his side with immense art, for no appearance of uttering one syllable had escaped him.

"A personal discussion, Sophronia, my love? What discussion? Fledgeby, I am jealous. What discussion, Fledgeby?"

"Shall I tell him, Mr. Fledgeby?" asked Mrs. Lammle.

Trying to look as if he knew anything about it, Fascination replied, "Yes, tell him."

"We were discussing, then," said Mrs. Lammle, "if you *must* know, Alfred, whether Mr. Fledgeby was in his usual flow of spirits."

"Why, that is the very point, Sophronia, that Georgiana and I were discussing as to herself! What did Fledgeby say?"

"Oh, a likely thing, sir, that I am going to tell you everything, and be told nothing! What did Georgiana say?"

"Georgiana said she was doing her usual justice to herself to-day, and I said she was not."

"Precisely," exclaimed Mrs. Lammle, "what I said to Mr. Fledgeby."

Still, it wouldn't do. They would not look at one another. No, not even when the sparkling host proposed that the quartet should take an appropriately sparkling glass of wine. Georgiana looked from her wineglass at Mr. Lammle and at Mrs. Lammle; but mightn't, couldn't, shouldn't, wouldn't look at Mr. Fledgeby. Fascination looked from his wineglass at Mrs. Lammle and at Mr. Lammle; but mightn't, couldn't, shouldn't, wouldn't look at Georgiana.

More prompting was necessary. Cupid must be brought up to the mark. The manager had put him down in the bill for the part, and he must play it.

"Sophronia, my dear," said Mr. Lammle, "I don't like the color of your dress."

"I appeal," said Mrs. Lammle, "to Mr. Fledgeby."

"And I," said Mr. Lammle, "to Georgiana."

"Georgy, my love," remarked Mrs. Lammle aside to her dear girl, "I rely upon you not to go over to the opposition. Now, Mr. Fledgeby."

Fascination wished to know if the color were not called rose color? Yes, said Mr. Lammle; actually he knew everything; it was really rose color. Fascination took rose color to mean the color of roses. (In this he was very warmly supported by Mr. and Mrs. Lammle.) Fascination had heard the term Queen of Flowers applied to the Rose. Similarly, it might be said that the Dress was the Queen of Dresses. ("Very happy, Fledgeby!" from Mr. Lammle.) Notwithstanding, Fas-

cination's opinion was that we all had our eyes — or at least a large majority of us — and that — and — and his further opinion was several ands, with nothing beyond them.

"Oh, Mr. Fledgeby," said Mrs. Lammle, "to desert me in that way! Oh, Mr. Fledgeby, to abandon my poor dear injured rose, and declare for blue!"

"Victory, victory!" cried Mr. Lammle; "your dress is condemned, my dear."

"But what," said Mrs. Lammle, stealing her affectionate hand towards her dear girl's, "what does Georgy say?"

"She says," replied Mr. Lammle, interpreting for her, "that in her eyes you look well in any color, Sophronia, and that, if she had expected to be embarrassed by so pretty a compliment as she has received, she would have worn another color herself. Though I tell her, in reply, that it would not have saved her, for whatever color she had worn would have been Fledgeby's color. But what does Fledgeby say?"

"He says," replied Mrs. Lammle, interpreting for him, and patting the back of her dear girl's hand, as if it were Fledgeby who was patting it, "that it was no compliment, but a little natural act of homage that he couldn't resist. And," expressing more feeling as if it were more feeling on the part of Fledgeby, "he is right, he is right!"

Still, no, not even now, would they look at one another. Seeming to gnash his sparkling teeth, studs, eyes, and buttons all at once, Mr. Lammle secretly bent a dark frown on the two, expressive of an intense desire to bring them together by knocking their heads together.

"Have you heard this opera of to-night, Fledgeby?" he asked, stopping very short, to prevent himself from running on into, "confound you!"

"Why, no, not exactly," said Fledgeby. "In fact, I don't know a note of it."

"Neither do you know it, Georgy?" said Mrs. Lammle.

"N-no," replied Georgiana faintly, under the sympathetic coincidence.

"Why, then," said Mrs. Lammle, charmed by the discovery which flowed from the premises, "you neither of you know it! How charming!"

Even the craven Fledgeby felt that the time was now come when he must strike a blow. He struck it by saying, partly to Mrs. Lammle and partly to the circumambient air, "I consider myself very fortunate in being reserved by"—

As he stopped dead, Mr. Lammle, making that gingerous bush of his whiskers to look out of, offered him the word "Destiny."

"No, I wasn't going to say that," said Fledgeby. "I was going to say Fate. I consider it very fortunate that Fate has written in the book of—in the book which is its own property—that I should go to that opera for the first time under the memorable circumstances of going with Miss Podsnap."

To which Georgiana replied, hooking her two little fingers in one another, and addressing the table-cloth, "Thank you, but I generally go with no one but you, Sophronia, and I like that very much."

Content perforce with this success for the time, Mr. Lammle let Miss Podsnap out of the room, as if he were opening her cage-door, and Mrs. Lammle followed. Coffee being presently served upstairs,

he kept a watch on Fledgeby until Miss Podsnap's cup was empty, and then directed him with his finger (as if that young gentleman were a slow Retriever) to go and fetch it. This feat he performed, not only without failure, but even with the original embellishment of informing Miss Podsnap that green tea was considered bad for the nerves. Though there Miss Podsnap unintentionally threw him out by faltering, "Oh, is it indeed? How does it act?" Which he was not prepared to elucidate.

The carriage announced, Mrs. Lammle said, "Don't mind me, Mr. Fledgeby; my skirts and cloak occupy both my hands; take Miss Podsnap." And he took her, and Mrs. Lammle went next, and Mr. Lammle went last, savagely following his little flock, like a drover.

But he was all sparkle and glitter in the box at the Opera, and there he and his dear wife made a conversation between Fledgeby and Georgiana in the following ingenious and skilful manner. They sat in this order: Mrs. Lammle, Fascination Fledgeby, Georgiana, Mr. Lammle. Mrs. Lammle made leading remarks to Fledgeby, only requiring monosyllabic replies. Mr. Lammle did the like with Georgiana. At times Mrs. Lammle would lean forward to address Mr. Lammle to this purpose:—

"Alfred, my dear, Mr. Fledgeby very justly says, apropos of the last scene, that true constancy would not require any such stimulant as the stage deems necessary." To which Mr. Lammle would reply, "Ay, Sophronia, my love, but, as Georgiana has observed to me, the lady had no sufficient reason to know the state of the gentleman's affections." To

which Mrs. Lammle would rejoin: "Very true, Alfred; but Mr. Fledgeby points out," this. To which Alfred would demur: "Undoubtedly, Sophronia, but Georgiana acutely remarks," that. Through this device the two young people conversed at great length, and committed themselves to a variety of delicate sentiments, without having once opened their lips, save to say yes or no, and even that not to one another.

Fledgeby took his leave of Miss Podsnap at the carriage door, and the Lammles dropped her at her own home, and on the way Mrs. Lammle archly rallied her, in her fond and protecting manner, by saying at intervals, "Oh, little Georgiana, little Georgiana!" Which was not much; but the tone added, "You have enslaved your Fledgeby."

And thus the Lammles got home at last, and the lady sat down moody and weary, looking at her dark lord engaged in a deed of violence with a bottle of soda water, as though he were wringing the neck of some unlucky creature, and pouring its blood down his throat. As he wiped his dripping whiskers in an ogreish way, he met her eyes, and pausing, said, with no very gentle voice, —

"Well?"

"Was such an absolute Booby necessary to the purpose?"

"I know what I am doing. He is no such dolt as you suppose."

"A genius, perhaps?"

"You sneer, perhaps; and you take a lofty air upon yourself, perhaps! But I tell you this: — when that young fellow's interest is concerned, he holds as tight as a horse-leech. When money is in

question with that young fellow, he is a match for the Devil."

"Is he a match for you?"

"He is. Almost as good a one as you thought me for you. He has no quality of youth in him, but such as you have seen to-day. Touch him upon money, and you touch no booby then. He really is a dolt, I suppose, in other things; but it answers his one purpose very well."

"Has she money in her own right in any case?"

"Ay! she has money in her own right in any case. You have done so well to-day, Sophronia, that I answer the question, though you know I object to any such questions. You have done so well to-day, Sophronia, that you must be tired. Get to bed."

CHAPTER V.

MERCURY PROMPTING.

FLEDGEBY deserved Mr. Alfred Lammle's eulogium. He was the meanest cur existing with a single pair of legs. And instinct (a word we all clearly understand) going largely on four legs, and reason always on two, meanness on four legs never attains the perfection of meanness on two.

The father of this young gentleman had been a money-lender, who had transacted professional business with the mother of this young gentleman, when he, the latter, was waiting in the vast dark ante-chambers of the present world to be born. The lady, a widow, being unable to pay the money-lender, married him; and, in due course, Fledgeby was summoned out of the vast dark ante-chambers to come and be presented to the Registrar-General. Rather a curious speculation how Fledgeby would otherwise have disposed of his leisure until Doomsday.

Fledgeby's mother offended her family by marrying Fledgeby's father. It is one of the easiest achievements in life to offend your family when your family want to get rid of you. Fledgeby's mother's family had been very much offended with

her for being poor, and broke with her for becoming comparatively rich. Fledgeby's mother's family was the Snigsworth family. She had even the high honour to be cousin to Lord Snigsworth — so many times removed that the noble earl would have had no compunction in removing her one time more, and dropping her clean outside the cousinly pale; but cousin for all that.

Among her pre-matrimonial transactions with Fledgeby's father, Fledgeby's mother had raised money of him at a great disadvantage on a certain reversionary interest. The reversion falling in soon after they were married, Fledgeby's father laid hold of the cash for his separate use and benefit. This led to subjective differences of opinion, not to say objective interchanges of bootjacks, backgammon boards, and other such domestic missiles, between Fledgeby's father and Fledgeby's mother, and those led to Fledgeby's mother spending as much money as she could, and to Fledgeby's father doing all he couldn't to restrain her. Fledgeby's childhood had been, in consequence, a stormy one; but the winds and the waves had gone down in the grave, and Fledgeby flourished alone.

He lived in chambers in the Albany, did Fledgeby, and maintained a spruce appearance. But his youthful fire was all composed of sparks from the grindstone: and as the sparks flew off, went out, and never warmed anything, be sure that Fledgeby had his tools at the grindstone, and turned it with a wary eye.

Mr. Alfred Lammle came round to the Albany to breakfast with Fledgeby. Present on the table, one scanty pot of tea, one scanty loaf, two scanty pats

of butter, two scanty rashers of bacon, two pitiful eggs, and an abundance of handsome china bought a second-hand bargain.

"What did you think of Georgiana?" asked Mr. Lammle.

"Why, I'll tell you," said Fledgeby very deliberately.

"Do, my boy."

"You misunderstand me," said Fledgeby. "I don't mean I'll tell you that. I mean I'll tell you something else."

"Tell me anything, old fellow!"

"Ah! but there you misunderstand me again," said Fledgeby. "I mean, I'll tell you nothing."

Mr. Lammle sparkled at him, but frowned at him too.

"Look here," said Fledgeby. "You're deep and you're ready. Whether I am deep or not, never mind. I am not ready. But I can do one thing, Lammle — I can hold my tongue. And I intend always doing it."

"You are a long-headed fellow, Fledgeby."

"Maybe, or may not be. If I am a short-tongued fellow, it may amount to the same thing. Now, Lammle, I am never going to answer questions."

"My dear fellow, it was the simplest question in the world."

"Never mind. It seemed so, but things are not always what they seem. I saw a man examined as a witness in Westminster Hall. Questions put to him seemed the simplest in the world, but turned out to be anything rather than that, after he had answered 'em. Very well. Then he should have held his

tongue. If he had held his tongue, he would have kept out of scrapes that he got into."

"If I had held my tongue, you would never have seen the subject of my question," remarked Lammle, darkening.

"Now, Lammle," said Fascination Fledgeby, calmly feeling for his whisker, "it won't do. I won't be led on into a discussion. I can't manage a discussion. But I can manage to hold my tongue."

"Can?" Mr. Lammle fell back upon propitiation. "I should think you could! Why, when these fellows of our acquaintance drink, and you drink with them, the more talkative they get, the more silent you get. The more they let out, the more you keep in."

"I don't object, Lammle," returned Fledgeby with an internal chuckle, "to being understood, though I object to being questioned. That certainly *is* the way I do it."

"And when all the rest of us are discussing our ventures, none of us ever know what a single venture of yours is!"

"And none of you ever will from me, Lammle," replied Fledgeby with another internal chuckle; "that certainly *is* the way I do it!"

"Why, of course it is, I know!" rejoined Lammle with a flourish of frankness, and a laugh, and stretching out his hands as if to show the universe a remarkable man in Fledgeby. "If I hadn't known it of my Fledgeby, should I have proposed our little compact of advantage to my Fledgeby?"

"Ah!" remarked Fascination, shaking his head slyly. "But I am not to be got at in that way. I am not vain. That sort of vanity don't pay, Lammle.

No, no, no. Compliments only make me hold my tongue the more."

Alfred Lammle pushed his plate away (no great sacrifice under the circumstances of there being so little in it), thrust his hands in his pockets, leaned back in his chair, and contemplated Fledgeby in silence. Then he slowly released his left hand from its pocket and made that bush of his whiskers, still contemplating him in silence. Then he slowly broke silence, and slowly said: "What — the — Dev-il this fellow about this morning?"

"Now, look here, Lammle," said Fascination Fledgeby, with the meanest of twinkles in his meanest of eyes: which were too near together, by the way: "look here, Lammle. I am very well aware that I didn't show to advantage last night, and that you and your wife — who, I consider, is a very clever woman and an agreeable woman — did. I am not calculated to show to advantage under that sort of circumstances. I know very well you two did show to advantage, and managed capitally. But don't you on that account come talking to me as if I was your doll and puppet, because I am not."

"And all this," cried Alfred, after studying with a look the meanness that was fain to have the meanest help, and yet was so mean as to turn upon it; "all this because of one simple natural question!"

"You should have waited till I thought proper to say something about it of myself. I don't like your coming over me with your Georgianas, as if you was her proprietor and mine too."

"Well, when you are in the gracious mind to

say anything about it of yourself," retorted Lammle, "pray do."

"I have done it. I have said you managed capitally. You and your wife both. If you go on managing capitally, I'll go on doing my part. Only don't crow."

"I crow!" exclaimed Lammle, shrugging his shoulders.

"Or," pursued the other — "or take it in your head that people are your puppets because they don't come out to advantage at the particular moments when you do, with the assistance of a very clever and agreeable wife. All the rest keep on doing, and let Mrs. Lammle keep on doing. Now, I have held my tongue when I thought proper, and I have spoken when I thought proper, and there's an end of that. And now the question is," proceeded Fledgeby with the greatest reluctance, "will you have another egg?"

"No, I won't," said Lammle, shortly.

"Perhaps you're right, and will find yourself better without it," replied Fascination in greatly improved spirits. "To ask you if you'll have another rasher would be unmeaning flattery, for it would make you thirsty all day. Will you have some more bread and butter?"

"No, I won't," repeated Lammle.

"Then I will," said Fascination. And it was not a mere retort for the sound's sake, but was a cheerful cogent consequence of the refusal; for, if Lammle had applied himself again to the loaf, it would have been so heavily visited, in Fledgeby's opinion, as to demand abstinence from bread, on his part, for the remainder of that meal at least, if not for the whole of the next.

Whether this young gentleman (for he was but three and twenty) combined with the miserly vice of an old man any of the open-handed vices of a young one, was a moot point; so very honorably did he keep his own counsel. He was sensible of the value of appearances as an investment, and liked to dress well; but he drove a bargain for every movable about him, from the coat on his back to the china on his breakfast-table; and every bargain, by representing somebody's ruin or somebody's loss, acquired a peculiar charm for him. It was a part of his avarice to take, within narrow bounds, long odds at races; if he won, he drove harder bargains; if he lost, he half starved himself until next time. Why money should be so precious to an Ass too dull and mean to exchange it for any other satisfaction is strange; but there is no animal so sure to get laden with it as the Ass who sees nothing written on the face of the earth and sky but the three letters L. S. D. — not Luxury, Sensuality, Dissoluteness, which they often stand for, but the three dry letters. Your concentrated Fox is seldom comparable to your concentrated Ass in money-breeding.

Fascination Fledgeby feigned to be a young gentleman living on his means, but was known secretly to be a kind of outlaw in the bill-broking line, and to put money out at high interest in various ways. His circle of familiar acquaintance, from Mr. Lammle round, all had a touch of the outlaw, as to their rovings in the merry greenwood of Jobbery Forest, lying on the outskirts of the Share Market and the Stock Exchange.

"I suppose you, Lammle," said Fledgeby, eating

his bread and butter, "always did go in for female society?"

"Always," replied Lammle, glooming considerably under his late treatment.

"Came natural to you, eh?" said Fledgeby.

"The sex were pleased to like me, sir," said Lammle sulkily, but with the air of a man who had not been able to help himself.

"Made a pretty good thing of marrying, didn't you?" asked Fledgeby.

The other smiled (an ugly smile), and tapped one tap upon his nose.

"My late governor made a mess of it," said Fledgeby. "But Geor—— Is the right name Georgina or Georgiana?"

"Georgiana."

"I was thinking yesterday, I didn't know there was such a name. I thought it must end in ina."

"Why?"

"Why, you play — if you can — the Concertina, you know," replied Fledgeby, meditating very slowly. "And you have — when you catch it — the Scarlatina. And you can come down from a balloon in a parach— No, you can't though. Well, say Georgeute — I mean Georgiana."

"You were going to remark of Georgiana — ?" Lammle moodily hinted, after waiting in vain.

"I was going to remark of Georgiana, sir," said Fledgeby, not at all pleased to be reminded of his having forgotten it, "that she don't seem to be violent. Don't seem to be of the pitching-in order."

"She has the gentleness of the dove, Mr. Fledgeby."

"Of course you'll say so," replied Fledgeby,

sharpening, the moment his interest was touched by another. "But, you know, the real lookout is this: — what I say, not what you say. I say — having my late governor and my late mother in my eye — that Georgiana don't seem to be of the pitching-in order."

The respected Mr. Lammle was a bully, by nature and by usual practice. Perceiving, as Fledgeby's affronts cumulated, that conciliation by no means answered the purpose here, he now directed a scowling look into Fledgeby's small eyes for the effect of the opposite treatment. Satisfied by what he saw there, he burst into a violent passion, and struck his hand upon the table, making the china ring and dance.

"You are a very offensive fellow, sir!" cried Mr. Lammle, rising. "You are a highly offensive scoundrel! What do you mean by this behavior?"

"I say!" remonstrated Fledgeby. "Don't break out!"

"You are a very offensive fellow, sir!" repeated Mr. Lammle. "You are a highly offensive scoundrel!"

"I *say*, you know!" urged Fledgeby, quailing.

"Why, you coarse and vulgar vagabond!" said Mr. Lammle, looking fiercely about him, "if your servant was here to give me sixpence of your money to get my boots cleaned afterwards — for you are not worth the expenditure — I'd kick you."

"No, you wouldn't," pleaded Fledgeby. "I'm sure you'd think better of it."

"I tell you what, Mr. Fledgeby," said Lammle, advancing on him. "Since you presume to contradict me, I'll assert myself a little. Give me your nose!"

Fledgeby covered it with his hand instead, and said, retreating, "I beg you won't!"

"Give me your nose, sir!" repeated Lammle.

Still covering that feature and backing, Mr. Fledgeby reiterated (apparently with a severe cold in his head), "I beg, I beg you won't."

"And this fellow," exclaimed Lammle, stopping and making the most of his chest—"this fellow presumes on my having selected him out of all the young fellows I know, for an advantageous opportunity! This fellow presumes on my having in my desk, round the corner, his dirty note of hand for a wretched sum payable on the occurrence of a certain event, which event can only be of my and my wife's bringing about! This fellow, Fledgeby, presumes to be impertinent to me, Lammle! Give me your nose, sir!"

"No! Stop! I beg your pardon," said Fledgeby with humility.

"What do you say, sir?" demanded Lammle, seeming too furious to understand.

"I beg your pardon," repeated Fledgeby.

"Repeat your words louder, sir. The just indignation of a gentleman has sent the blood boiling to my head. I don't hear you."

"I say," repeated Fledgeby with laborious explanatory politeness, "I beg your pardon."

Mr. Lammle paused. "As a man of honor," said he, throwing himself into a chair, "I am disarmed."

Mr. Fledgeby also took a chair, though less demonstratively, and by slow approaches removed his hand from his nose. Some natural diffidence assailed him as to blowing it, so shortly after its having assumed a personal and delicate, not to say

public character; but he overcame his scruples by degrees, and modestly took that liberty under an implied protest.

"Lammle," he said sneakingly, when that was done, "I hope we are friends again?"

"Mr. Fledgeby," returned Lammle, "say no more."

"I must have gone too far in making myself disagreeable," said Fledgeby, "but I never intended it."

"Say no more, say no more!" Mr. Lammle repeated in a magnificent tone. "Give me your" — Fledgeby started — "hand."

They shook hands, and on Mr. Lammle's part, in particular, there ensued great geniality. For, he was quite as much of a dastard as the other, and had been in equal danger of falling into the second place for good, when he took heart just in time, to act upon the information conveyed to him by Fledgeby's eye.

The breakfast ended in a perfect understanding. Incessant machinations were to be kept at work by Mr. and Mrs. Lammle; love was to be made for Fledgeby, and conquest was to be insured him; he on his part very humbly admitting his defects as to the softer social arts, and entreating to be backed to the utmost by his two able coadjutors.

Little recked Mr. Podsnap of the traps and toils besetting his Young Person. He regarded her as safe within the Temple of Podsnappery, biding the fulness of time when she, Georgiana, should take him, Fitz-Podsnap, who with all his worldly goods should her endow. It would call a blush into the cheek of his standard Young Person to have anything to do with such matters save to take as

directed, and with worldly goods as per settlement to be endowed. Who giveth this woman to be married to this man? I, Podsnap. Perish the daring thought that any smaller creation should come between!

It was a public holiday, and Fledgeby did not recover his spirits or his usual temperature of nose until the afternoon. Walking into the City in the holiday afternoon, he walked against a living stream setting out of it; and thus, when he turned into the precincts of St. Mary Axe, he found a prevalent repose and quiet there. A yellow, overhanging, plaster-fronted house, at which he stopped, was quiet too. The blinds were all drawn down, and the inscription Pubsey and Co. seemed to doze in the counting-house window on the ground-floor giving on the sleepy street.

Fledgeby knocked and rang, and Fledgeby rang and knocked, but no one came. Fledgeby crossed the narrow street and looked up at the house windows, but nobody looked down at Fledgeby. He got out of temper, crossed the narrow street again, and pulled the house bell as if it were the house's nose, and he were taking a hint from his late experience. His ear at the keyhole seemed then, at last, to give him assurance that something stirred within. His eye at the keyhole seemed to confirm his ear, for he angrily pulled the house's nose again, and pulled, and continued to pull, until a human nose appeared in the dark doorway.

"Now, you sir!" cried Fledgeby. "These are nice games!"

He addressed an old Jewish man in an ancient coat, long of skirt, and wide of pocket. A vener-

able man, bald and shining at the top of his head, and with long gray hair flowing down at its sides and mingling with his beard. A man who with a graceful Eastern action of homage bent his head, and stretched out his hands with the palms downward, as if to deprecate the wrath of a superior.

"What have you been up to?" said Fledgeby, storming at him.

"Generous Christian master," urged the Jewish man, "it being holiday, I looked for no one."

"Holiday be blowed!" said Fledgeby, entering. "What have *you* got to do with holidays? Shut the door."

With his former action the old man obeyed. In the entry hung his rusty, large-brimmed, low-crowned hat, as long out of date as his coat; in the corner near it stood his staff — no walking-stick, but a veritable staff. Fledgeby turned into the counting-house, perched himself on a business stool, and cocked his hat. There were light boxes on shelves in the counting-house, and strings of mock beads hanging up. There were samples of cheap clocks, and samples of cheap vases of flowers. Foreign toys, all.

Perched on the stool, with his hat cocked on his head, and one of his legs dangling, the youth of Fledgeby hardly contrasted to advantage with the age of the Jewish man as he stood with his bare head bowed, and his eyes (which he only raised in speaking) on the ground. His clothing was worn down to the rusty hue of the hat in the entry, but, though he looked shabby, he did not look mean. Now, Fledgeby, though not shabby, did look mean.

"You have not told me what you were up to, you

sir," said Fledgeby, scratching his head with the brim of his hat.

"Sir, I was breathing the air."

"In the cellar, that you didn't hear?"

"On the housetop."

"Upon my soul! That's a way of doing business."

"Sir," the old man represented with a grave and patient air, "there must be two parties to the transaction of business, and the holiday has left me alone."

"Ah! Can't be buyer and seller too. That's what the Jews say; ain't it?"

"At least we say truly, if we say so," answered the old man with a smile.

"Your people need speak the truth sometimes, for they lie enough," remarked Fascination Fledgeby.

"Sir, there is," returned the old man with quiet emphasis, "too much untruth among all denominations of men."

Rather dashed, Fascination Fledgeby took another scratch at his intellectual head with his hat, to gain time for rallying.

"For instance," he resumed, as though it were he who had spoken last, "who but you and I ever heard of a poor Jew?"

"The Jews," said the old man, raising his eyes from the ground with his former smile. "They hear of poor Jews often, and are very good to them."

"Bother that," returned Fledgeby. "You know what I mean. You'd persuade me, if you could, that you are a poor Jew. I wish you'd confess how much you really did make out of my late governor. I should have a better opinion of you."

The old man only bent his head, and stretched out his hands as before.

"Don't go on posturing like a Deaf and Dumb School," said the ingenious Fledgeby, "but express yourself like a Christian — or as nearly as you can."

"I had had sickness and misfortunes, and was so poor," said the old man, "as hopelessly to owe the father principal and interest. The son, inheriting, was so merciful as to forgive me both, and place me here."

He made a little gesture as though he kissed the hem of an imaginary garment worn by the noble youth before him. It was humbly done, but picturesquely, and was not abasing to the doer.

"You won't say more, I see," said Fledgeby, looking at him as if he would like to try the effect of extracting a double tooth or two, "and so it's of no use my putting it to you. But confess this, Riah: who believes you to be poor now?"

"No one," said the old man.

"There you're right," assented Fledgeby.

"No one," repeated the old man with a grave slow wave of his head. "All scout it as a fable. Were I to say, 'This little fancy business is not mine;'" with a lithe sweep of his easily-turning hand around him, to comprehend the various objects on the shelves; "'it is the little business of a Christian young gentleman who places me, his servant, in trust and charge here, and to whom I am accountable for every single bead,' they would laugh. When, in the larger money business, I tell the borrowers" —

"I say, old chap," interposed Fledgeby, "I hope you mind what you *do* tell 'em?"

"Sir, I tell them no more than I am about to repeat. When I tell them, 'I cannot promise this, I cannot answer for the other, I must see my principal, I have not the money, I am a poor man, and it does not rest with me,' they are so unbelieving and so impatient, that they sometimes curse me in Jehovah's name."

"That's deuced good, that is!" said Fascination Fledgeby.

"And at other times they say, 'Can it never be done without these tricks, Mr. Riah? Come, come, Mr. Riah, we know the acts of your people'—my people!—'If the money is to be lent, fetch it, fetch it; if it is not to be lent, keep it and say so.' They never believe me."

"That's all right," said Fascination Fledgeby.

"They say, 'We know, Mr. Riah, we know. We have but to look at you, and we know.'"

"Oh, a good 'un are you for the post," thought Fledgeby, "and a good 'un was I to mark you out for it! I may be slow, but I am precious sure."

Not a syllable of this reflection shaped itself in any scrap of Mr. Fledgeby's breath, lest it should tend to put his servant's price up. But looking at the old man as he stood quiet with his head bowed and his eyes cast down, he felt that to relinquish an inch of his baldness, an inch of his gray hair, an inch of his coat-skirt, an inch of his hat-brim, an inch of his walking-staff, would be to relinquish hundreds of pounds.

"Look here, Riah," said Fledgeby, mollified by these self-approving considerations. "I want to go a little more into buying up queer bills. Look out in that direction."

"Sir, it shall be done."

"Casting my eye over the accounts, I find that branch of business pays pretty fairly, and I am game for extending it. I like to know people's affairs, likewise. So look out."

"Sir, I will promptly."

"Put it about in the right quarters that you'll buy queer bills by the lump — by the pound weight if that's all — supposing you see your way to a fair chance on looking over the parcel. And there's one thing more. Come to me with the books for periodical inspection, as usual, at eight on Monday morning."

Riah drew some folding tablets from his breast and noted it down.

"That's all I wanted to say at the present time," continued Fledgeby in a grudging vein, as he got off the stool, "except that I wish you'd take the air where you can hear the bell, or the knocker, either one of the two, or both. By the by, how *do* you take the air at the top of the house? Do you stick your head out of a chimney-pot?"

"Sir, there are leads there, and I have made a little garden there."

"To bury your money in, you old dodger?"

"A thumb-nail's space of garden would hold the treasure *I* bury, master," said Riah. "Twelve shillings a week, even when they are an old man's wages, bury themselves."

"I should like to know what you really are worth," returned Fledgeby, with whom his growing rich on that stipend and gratitude was a very convenient fiction. "But come! Let's have a look at your garden on the tiles before I go."

The old man took a step back, and hesitated.

"Truly, sir, I have company there."

"Have you, by George!" said Fledgeby. "I suppose you happen to know whose premises these are?"

"Sir, they are yours, and I am your servant in them."

"Oh! I thought you might have overlooked that," retorted Fledgeby, with his eyes on Riah's beard as he felt for his own; "having company on my premises, you know!"

"Come up and see the guests, sir. I hope for your admission that they can do no harm."

Passing him with a courteous reverence, specially unlike any action that Mr. Fledgeby could for his life have imparted to his own head and hands, the old man began to ascend the stairs. As he toiled on before, with his palm upon the stair-rail, and his long black skirt, a very gaberdine, overhanging each successive step, he might have been the leader in some pilgrimage of devotional ascent to a prophet's tomb. Not troubled by any such weak imagining, Fascination Fledgeby merely speculated on the time of life at which his beard had begun, and thought once more what a good 'un he was for the part.

Some final wooden steps conducted them, stooping under a low pent-house roof, to the housetop. Riah stood still, and, turning to his master, pointed out his guests.

Lizzie Hexam and Jenny Wren. For whom, perhaps with some old instinct of his race, the gentle Jew had spread a carpet. Seated on it, against no more romantic object than a blackened chimney-stack over which some humble creeper had been trained, they both pored over one book; both with attentive

faces; Jenny with the sharper; Lizzie with the more perplexed. Another little book or two were lying near, and a common basket of common fruit, and another basket full of strings of beads and tinsel scraps. A few boxes of humble flowers and evergreens completed the garden; and the encompassing wilderness of dowager old chimneys twirled their cowls and fluttered their smoke, rather as if they were bridling, and fanning themselves, and looking on in a state of airy surprise.

Taking her eyes off the book to test her memory of something in it, Lizzie was the first to see herself observed. As she rose, Miss Wren likewise became conscious, and said, irreverently addressing the great chief of the premises: "Whoever you are, *I* can't get up, because my back's bad and my legs are queer."

"This is my master," said Riah, stepping forward.

("Don't look like anybody's master," observed Miss Wren to herself, with a hitch of her chin and eyes.)

"This, sir," pursued the old man, "is a little dressmaker for little people. Explain to the master, Jenny."

"Dolls; that's all," said Jenny, shortly. "Very difficult to fit too, because their figures are so uncertain. You never know where to expect their waists."

"Her friend," resumed the old man, motioning towards Lizzie; "and as industrious as virtuous. But that they both are. They are busy early and late, sir, early and late; and in by-times, as on this holiday, they go to book-learning."

"Not much good to be got out of that," remarked Fledgeby.

"Depends upon the person!" quoth Miss Wren, snapping him up.

"I made acquaintance with my guests, sir," pursued the Jew, with an evident purpose of drawing out the dressmaker, "through their coming here to buy of our damage and waste for Miss Jenny's millinery. Our waste goes into the best of company, sir, on her rosy-cheeked little customers. They wear it in their hair, and on their ball-dresses, and even (so she tells me) are presented at Court with it."

"Ah!" said Fledgeby, on whose intelligence this doll-fancy made rather strong demands; "she's been buying that basketful to-day, I suppose?"

"I suppose she has," Miss Jenny interposed; "and paying for it too, most likely!"

"Let's have a look at it," said the suspicious chief. Riah handed it to him. "How much for this, now?"

"Two precious silver shillings," said Miss Wren.

Riah confirmed her with two nods, as Fledgeby looked to him. A nod for each shilling.

"Well," said Fledgeby, poking into the contents of the basket with his forefinger, "the price is not so bad. You have got good measure, Miss What-is-it."

"Try Jenny," suggested that young lady with great calmness.

"You have got good measure, Miss Jenny; but the price is not so bad. — And you," said Fledgeby, turning to the other visitor, "do you buy anything here, miss?"

"No, sir."

"Nor sell anything neither, miss?"

"No, sir."

Looking askew at the questioner, Jenny stole her hand up to her friend's, and drew her friend down, so that she bent beside her on her knee.

"We are thankful to come here for rest, sir," said Jenny. "You see, you don't know what the rest of this place is to us; does he, Lizzie? It's the quiet, and the air."

"The quiet!" repeated Fledgeby, with a contemptuous turn of his head towards the City's roar. "And the air!" with a "Poof!" at the smoke.

"Ah!" said Jenny. "But it's so high. And you see the clouds rushing on above the narrow streets, not minding them, and you see the golden arrows pointing at the mountains in the sky from which the wind comes, and you feel as if you were dead."

The little creature looked above her, holding up her slight transparent hand.

"How do you feel when you are dead?" asked Fledgeby, much perplexed.

"Oh, so tranquil!" cried the little creature, smiling. "Oh, so peaceful and so thankful! And you hear the people who are alive crying, and working, and calling to one another down in the close dark streets, and you seem to pity them so! And such a chain has fallen from you, and such a strange good sorrowful happiness comes upon you!"

Her eyes fell on the old man, who, with his hands folded, quietly looked on.

"Why, it was only just now," said the little creature, pointing at him, "that I fancied I saw him come out of his grave! He toiled out at that low

door so bent and worn, and then he took his breath and stood upright, and looked all round him at the sky, and the wind blew upon him, and his life down in the dark was over! — Till he was called back to life," she added, looking round at Fledgeby with that lower look of sharpness. "Why did you call him back?"

"He was long enough coming, anyhow," grumbled Fledgeby.

"But *you* are not dead, you know," said Jenny Wren. "Get down to life!"

Mr. Fledgeby seemed to think it rather a good suggestion, and with a nod turned round. As Riah followed to attend him downstairs, the little creature called out to the Jew in a silvery tone, "Don't be long gone. Come back, and be dead!" And still as they went down they heard the little sweet voice, more and more faintly, half calling and half singing, "Come back and be dead, Come back and be dead!"

When they got down into the entry, Fledgeby, pausing under the shadow of the broad old hat, and mechanically poising the staff, said to the old man, —

"That's a handsome girl, that one in her senses."

"And as good as handsome," answered Riah.

"At all events," observed Fledgeby with a dry whistle, "I hope she ain't bad enough to put any chap up to the fastenings, and get the premises broken open. You look out. Keep your weather eye awake, and don't make any more acquaintances, however handsome. Of course you always keep my name to yourself?"

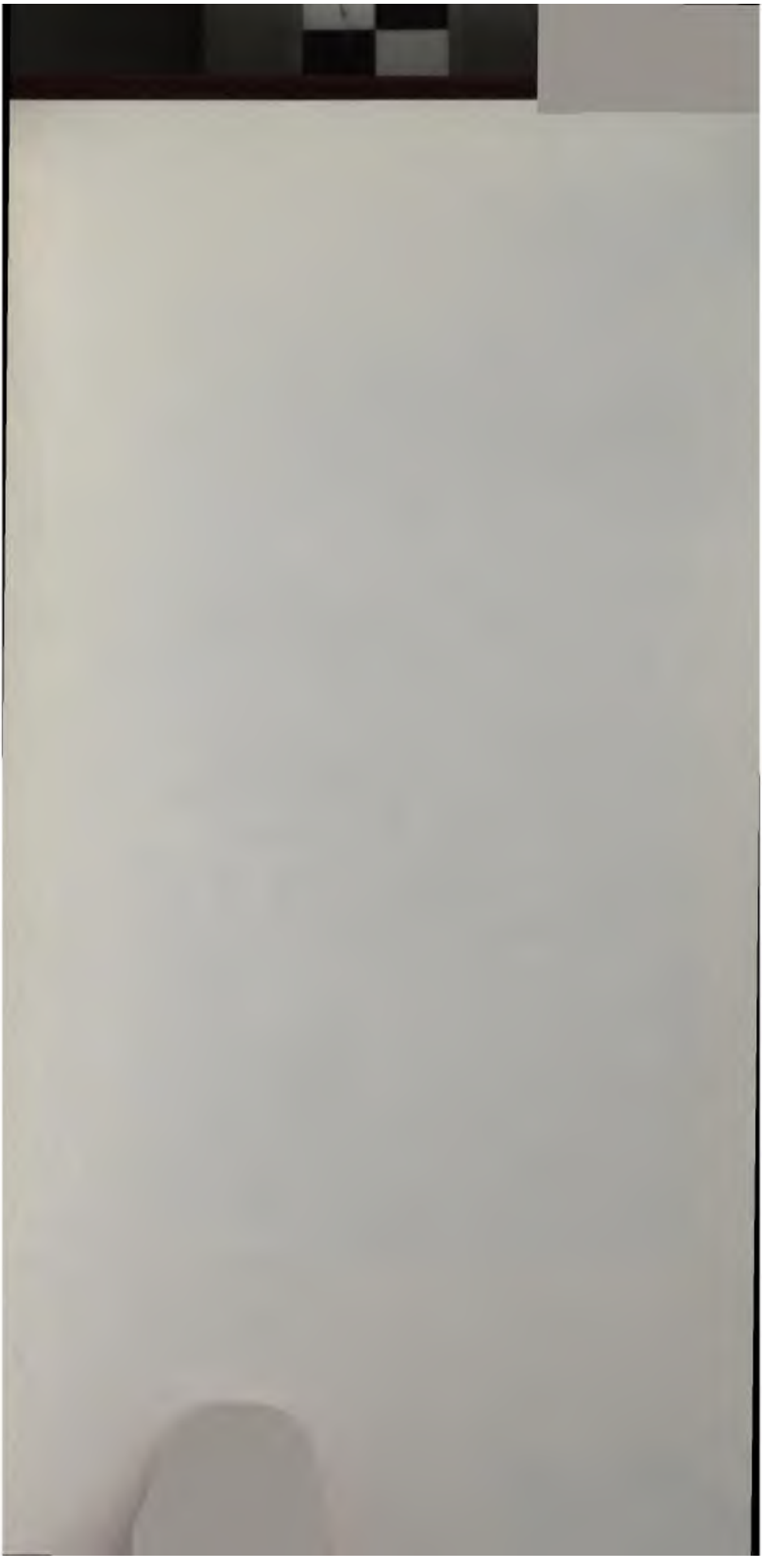
"Sir, assuredly I do."

"If they ask it, say it's Pubsey, or say it's Co., or say it's anything you like, but what it is."

His grateful servant — in whose race gratitude is deep, strong, and enduring — bowed his head, and actually did now put the hem of his coat to his lips; though so lightly that the wearer knew nothing of it.

Thus, Fascination Fledgeby went his way, exulting in the artful cleverness with which he had turned his thumb down on a Jew, and the old man went his different way upstairs. As he mounted, the call or song began to sound in his ears again, and, looking above, he saw the face of the little creature looking down out of a Glory of her long bright radiant hair, and musically repeating to him, like a vision, —

"Come up and be dead! Come up and be dead!"



3 2044 004 785 010

THE BORROWER WILL BE CHARGED THE COST OF OVERDUE NOTIFICATION IF THIS BOOK IS NOT RETURNED TO THE LIBRARY ON OR BEFORE THE LAST DATE STAMPED BELOW.

BOOK DUE-WID
6438460
JUL 7 1979
CANCELLED
APR 18 1979
WIDENER
SEP 4 0 1998
SEP 0 5 1998
CANCELLED

Acme
Bookbinding Co., Inc.
300 Summer Street
Boston 10, Mass.

3 2044 004 785 01

THE BORROWER WILL BE CHARGED THE COST OF OVERDUE NOTIFICATION IF THIS BOOK IS NOT RETURNED TO THE LIBRARY ON OR BEFORE THE LAST DATE STAMPED BELOW.

BOOK DUE-WID
6436A-0
JUL 7 1979
CANCELLED
APR 18 1979

WIDENER
SEP 1 0 1998
SEP 0 5 1998
CANCELLED